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SASKATCHEWAN INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT & RESEARCH UNIT

REGINA'S HIDDEN YOUTH: FINAL REPORT

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July 1999



UNIVERSITY OF REGINA



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REGINA'S HIDDEN YOUTH: FINAL REPORT

Prepared for the
Saskatchewan Instructional
Development & Research Unit

With funding from
Saskatchewan Education and
Prevention & Support Grant Program,
Government of Saskatchewan

by

Dennis Schaefer

July 1999

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Hidden Youth Project was designed to examine the physical, social, educational, and family needs of youth living on the streets or in unstable situations in Regina and to identify gaps and overlaps in service provision. The Project was financed through Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Children, Prevention and Support Grant Program (Regina Regional Intersectoral Committee) and the Indian and Métis Development Program, Saskatchewan Education. The Saskatchewan Instructional Development & Research Unit, at the University of Regina, conducted the research.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of Phase 1 were to:

1. Determine the prevalence of youth on the streets and not attending school
2. Explore the physical, social, educational, and family needs of these young people
3. Identify issues/problems related to effective and coordinated service provision.

METHODS

To maximize the validity of the findings and to determine experiential outcomes, the research design incorporated a variety of methods and data sources. While both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, an emphasis was placed on qualitative data. This emphasis was used to connect study findings more closely with experiential outcomes.

Data-collection methods included:

1. Individual, semistructured, and open-ended interviews with a representative sample of street youth, reclaimed youth, front-line workers, and administrators of relevant government departments and government agencies.
2. Focus groups with teachers, police, and other relevant community members and service providers.
3. Dialogue groups of youth/reclaimed youth.
4. Survey to government and nongovernment departments and agencies.
5. Seminar session with youth and front-line service providers to review and refine the recommendations.

An Advisory Committee, consisting of 26 representatives from the educational sector, government agencies, human-service organizations, and the University of Regina was formed to act in a consultative capacity to provide advice, guidance, and feedback to the Hidden Youth Project Team.

TIMELINES

August – November 1998

- Creation of Hidden Youth Project Advisory Committee
- Design and dissemination of survey for service providers and teachers

November 1998 – February 1999

- Individual interviews, dialogue and focus group interviews with street youth/youth at risk, service providers

March – April 1999

- Preliminary analysis of the data collected and development of initial findings
- Discussion of first interim report with Advisory Committee

May – June 1999

- Initial development of recommendations and seminar with youth and front-line service providers
- Discussion of second interim report with Advisory Committee

July 1999

- Final report.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Current Canadian, provincial, and local research that focused on street youth/youth at risk was extensively reviewed. The majority of these reports summarized research undertaken in the 90s, particularly within the last 4 years.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings are presented here as they relate to the objectives of the Hidden Youth Project.

Objective 1: Prevalence of Youth on the Streets

1. The varied and elusive nature of Regina's street youth population makes it virtually impossible to specify the exact numbers of youth on the streets or living a street lifestyle.
2. The specification of numbers, in terms of the street youth population, is partly contingent on how *street youth* is defined.
3. The prevalence of street youth is linked to the economic, political, and social factors of the larger community.
4. Service providers were more concerned about meeting the needs of a large population at risk than obtaining numbers of those who fit the criteria "street youth."

5. The majority of runaways and street youth in Regina are Aboriginal youth who come from low-income families and are facing a multitude of challenges.

Objective 2: Needs of Street Youth/Youth at Risk

1. Youth living on the street, or in marginal situations related to street life, lack consistent and reliable provision of safe shelter, food, health care, and clothing.
2. Many of the basic needs of street youth/youth at risk change with their changing circumstances, while other needs related to social, emotional, and spiritual supports, are pervasive over time and call for long-term supports.
3. Female street youth face different challenges and have different needs than male street youth.
4. The Regina interviews yielded little evidence to support the view that the choice of a street lifestyle was simply arbitrary or unrelated to challenges the youth were facing.
5. A major part of what is lacking in the lives of street youth is the fundamental need to feel valued and respected as a person.
6. Street youth/youth at risk discussed cultural needs in relation to their need for a positive cultural identity.

Objective 3: Issues and Problems Related to Effective and Coordinated Service Provision

1. Inadequate funding for service provision results in a lack of resources to provide adequate services to street youth/youth at risk.
2. There is support for integrative and collaborative approaches to service provision; however, in practice, there are serious challenges concerning implementation.
3. For funding purposes and to provide adequate service provision, service programs/providers face significant dilemmas in defining street youth/youth at risk: they must meet the needs of youth and, at the same time, be accountable to the community.
4. Service providers identified the building of a quality relationship between themselves and youth as a key element in meeting the needs of street youth/youth at risk.
5. Service providers identified personal characteristics and specific program approaches as necessary to building positive relationships with youth.
6. Cross-cultural sensitivity/awareness was recognized as important; however, there is disagreement as to how this should be approached.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

1. Lack of opportunities and the accumulation of risk factors make large numbers of youth from Regina's First Nations and Métis communities vulnerable to dangerous and damaging lifestyles.

2. Present societal values prohibit the implementation of the structural changes required to provide adequate supports to youth/families at risk.
3. Both short- and long-term supports are needed at a level not currently available.
4. Preventative programming that is focused on families, infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and young children is needed and is less costly in the long term than the incarceration and/or "rehabilitation" of youth who become addicts and offenders.
5. Schools are key sites where preventative measures are possible.
6. Present funding is inadequate in all areas of service provision and is especially lacking for prevention purposes.
7. Competition for limited funds in the nongovernment sector often results in territorial disputes and an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility.
8. The type of integration that appears to be most needed is not at the level of smaller nongovernment programs banding together. Rather, what seems to be most needed is integrated service provision from the major government institutions responsible for the welfare of children and youth at risk.
9. Service providers are aware of and consistently describe the personal qualities and program characteristics that contribute to good service provision (see pp. 44, 45).
10. Street youth/Youth at risk do not fit into the dominant societal definitions and norms that distinguish children from adults. At present, many contradictions and conflicts center on our inability as a society to come to terms with the circumstances of youth at risk as being neither those of a child nor those of an adult. Definitions of a process-oriented nature need to be developed to address these dilemmas (see p. 45).
11. Service providers who work with families, children, and youth at risk require monetary remuneration and personal recognition that more adequately reflect the valuable and demanding roles they play in their communities.
12. Failure to meet the needs of street youth does not appear to be a problem of indifference or prejudice on the part of service providers, although many youth feel that. Rather, the problem appears to be more related to an inability to meet their needs with inadequate resources.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Value Focus Necessary for Implementation of Recommendations

The magnitude of structural change required involves a shift in societal values from a materialistic/individualistic focus to a more caring, just, and communally responsible society. Implicit in the Recommendations is provision of **adequate funding** and a focus on **preventative-programming** measures.

The following actions are fundamental to improving service provision and should underlie all decision making related to implementing the Recommendations of this report.

- Increased resources for "in-home" family support workers and services to help develop family capabilities and keep families together

- Decreased pupil/teacher ratio in schools and an increased number of adults (trained volunteers and paraprofessionals) to provide key educational programming and personal support to vulnerable children and youth
- Provision of authentic, adequate integrated services in every low-income community (basic/core services should be available in one central building complex)
- Support for and valuing of community initiatives that propose creative solutions and informal structures.

Immediate Physical, Emotional, and Educational Needs and Supports

1. Priority must be given to creating community sanctioned "safeplaces" for youth to use in emergency situations, as well as finding ways to increase sufficient, appropriate longer term housing placements for youth at risk.
2. There is an urgent need to establish long-term drug-and-alcohol healing/treatment centre/programs specifically designed for youth.
3. There is an urgent need for increased space in alternative-school settings/programs, with a curricular emphasis on meeting the practical, personal, and cultural needs of the youth, rather than a curricula based solely on the requirements for certification/diploma.
4. Schools need to provide smaller school structures that create welcoming and inclusive atmospheres within larger school settings. School boards need to raise public awareness concerning the long-term cost effectiveness of smaller high schools.
5. Schools and other educational/developmental programs must recognize the importance of creative-aesthetic, spiritual, and recreational-physical development which strengthens a positive sense of self-worth in vulnerable youth.
6. Preemployment preparation program opportunities designed to develop the skills/abilities of youth must be increased. Programs designed to meet the unique needs, challenges, and requirements of First Nations and Métis youth are especially needed.

Long-Term Commitments Necessary to Provide Consistency, Continuity, and Stability for Youth at Risk and for the Human-Service Sector

7. Government must lead the way in service integration by providing a full range of basic (core) services required by youth, families, and communities at risk and do so in an integrated manner. These basic services should be available to the youth/families within a school/community-centre complex.

8. Funding and decision making related to youth at risk must give priority to prevention programming.
9. An interagency training program should be established to support and upgrade service providers' qualifications for working with youth at risk within an integrated service model. This program should include appropriate training/preparation of people/organizations in the values, attitudes, and behaviours for providing integrated services.
10. Community Youth Councils and leadership programs/teams need to be established under the guidance and with the support of adults, whereby youth are provided opportunities to have meaningful input/responsibilities in programs/activities.
11. Nongovernmental agencies should be encouraged and supported in their efforts to partner and integrate with core community service-provision centres, in order to offer a broad range of specialized programming services identified by youth and communities.
12. Increased funding for all sectors of human services, (government and nongovernment) that serve children, youth, and families at risk. (See pp. 49, 50 for full Recommendation.)
13. Policies and procedures governing nongovernment agencies must be reviewed and restructured to make better, or different, use of available funds. This should include clarification of differences and roles between government and nongovernment agencies.
14. Programs serving street youth/youth at risk need to be culturally relevant and sensitive. Cultural relevance and sensitivity should be a central element in evaluating the programs that serve youth at risk. (See Recommendation 16, pp. 50, 51.)
15. Policies must be developed that take into account process-oriented definitions of youth, as opposed to definitions of youth which are based solely on age and are the criteria used for funding, assessment, legal requirements, and for covering liability concerns. There is a need for greater public awareness of the dilemmas service providers face, as well as a need for public participation (multiple voices/perspectives) in developing process-oriented definitions for youth and adults. (See Recommendation 17, pp. 51, 52.)
16. Ways must be found to increase supports for, and positive recognition of, service providers who work directly with youth and families at risk. In addition to competitive salaries, key actions that need attention are reduced workloads and ways to increase collegiality and reduce isolation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit (SIDRU) wants to acknowledge the following people for their contributions to and support of the Regina's Hidden Youth Project.

Firstly, a sincere thank you to the young people who were willing to share their life's stories with us. It is their courage to speak the truth about their lives, at times moving and inspiring and at times sad and painful, that we hope will inspire a renewed commitment from the Regina community to work collaboratively on behalf of these young people.

Secondly, thanks to the many service providers, government, nongovernment, education, police and community members who spoke freely and openly about the challenges they face on a daily basis.

Thirdly, we wish to express our appreciation to the Hidden Youth Advisory Committee members who together with the Project Team, struggled with the many issues surrounding this problem and provided the Project with valuable guidance, feedback and advice.

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Finally, to the SIDRU Director and support staff, all who have contributed to the Project in special ways, a sincere thank you. The Project in general and the youth in particular, have challenged us all to reflect on our own values, attitudes and behaviours and those of the world around us.

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OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The Hidden Youth Project was designed to examine the physical, social, educational, and family needs of youth living on the streets or in unstable situations in Regina and to identify gaps and overlaps in service provision.

The Hidden Youth Project was also designed to complement other recent Regina studies and to gather multiple perspectives from the human services sector in order to contribute to a more complete picture and better understanding of the Regina context.

BACKGROUND

The Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit, at the University of Regina, conducted the research. The project was financed through Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Children, Prevention and Support Grant Program (Regina Regional Intersectoral Committee) and the Indian and Métis Education Development Program, Saskatchewan Education.

OBJECTIVES

Phase 1 objectives were to:

1. Determine the prevalence of youth on the streets and not attending school
2. Explore the physical, social, educational, and family needs of these young people
3. Identify issues/problems related to effective and coordinated service provision.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

To maximize the validity of the findings and to get at experiential outcomes, the research design incorporated a variety of methods and data sources. While both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, an emphasis was placed on qualitative data. This emphasis was employed to help connect study findings more closely with experiential outcomes.

Data collection and analyses focused on the question: What information is most likely to make a difference at the experiential level for both the targeted youth population and the service providers who work with them?

The research design also included an extensive literature review with the major purposes of (a) providing further validation for the themes and patterns uncovered in the Regina context and (b) focusing the study on that which is unique about the Regina context.

The qualitative research technique of triangulation (collection of data by more than one method and/or from more than one source) was employed extensively. A number of questions were asked in similar ways of all participants (e.g., questions related to needs of youth on the streets/at risk). Recurring patterns in the responses to several of these key questions helped to confirm the validity of the responses. A related check on validity was independent data analysis. Individual researchers analyzed the data from the interviews or focus groups that each conducted, without knowledge of the analyses of other project team members. As patterns emerged across these analyses, validity of collected data was established with more confidence.

A final aspect of this study design was the technique of successive focusing. This technique supports the most effective use of limited resources. Successive focusing means that different categories of data are collected in a particular sequence in such a manner that initial findings from one source can inform sampling decisions and research questions in a subsequent round of data collection. For example, an overview of results from the initial surveys returned was used in refining the questions developed for interviews with youth and service providers/administrators. A further example would be that data from the survey and from the interviews with reclaimed youth were used to inform sampling decisions in relation to human-service agencies and departments.

DATA-COLLECTION METHODS

Data-collection methods included:

1. Individual, semistructured, and open-ended interviews with a representative sample of street youth, reclaimed youth¹, front-line workers, and administrators of relevant government departments and nongovernment agencies.
2. Focus groups were held with teachers and other relevant community members and service providers.
3. Dialogue groups of youth/reclaimed youth were conducted as a means of broadening the youth context as well as validating and substantiating the information and stories from the individual interviews.
4. A written survey constituted part of the data-gathering process and was sent to government and nongovernment departments and agencies, as well as individuals within the Regina Public and Separate School Boards.
5. A seminar with selected youth/reclaimed youth and front-line service providers was held to validate findings and to review and refine the recommendations for service provision emanating from the research.

All interviews, focus groups, and dialogue groups were tape recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of the statements of those interviewed.

¹ Reclaimed youth is the term for youth over 18 who are no longer on the streets.

ROLE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

An Advisory Committee, consisting of 26 representatives from the educational sector, government agencies, human-service organizations, and the University of Regina was formed to act in a consultative capacity to provide advice, guidance, and feedback to the Hidden Youth Project Team. A secondary purpose of the Committee was to inform government and community agencies about the research and its potential usefulness in policy development and service provision. The Committee met four times over the course of Phase 1 of the project.

ETHICAL SAFEGUARDS

All study participants were guaranteed that their contributions would be confidential and that they would not be identified in any way in the interim or final reports. The study received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Review Committee, University of Regina. To ensure anonymity we used broad categories, such as youth or service providers/administrators, when quoting participants to avoid aligning respondents too closely with specific information.

This was a particularly important reporting strategy given the sensitive nature of the content uncovered in the youth interviews and of the vulnerability of the youth interviewed. As well, many service providers feel exposed in relation to their identification with particular nongovernment agencies or to their role in government. The need for service providers to openly speak about their concerns and beliefs sometimes meant criticism of policies or practices within their workplace. This necessitated adopting sampling procedures and reporting methods that would best ensure their anonymity.

Many of the individual, youth/reclaimed youth interviews were conducted in the participant's living environment as this was less threatening for the youth and afforded an opportunity to observe the youth in context.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Youth

The individual, in-depth youth interviews consisted of 12 young people ranging in age from 12 to 18 years of age. The youth interviewed included both males and females of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry who represented a variety of circumstances ranging from *hidden/victimized youth* to *young offenders* in alternative school settings.

Six, individual in-depth interviews were held with reclaimed youth. Names of youth for the individual interviews were obtained from reclaimed youth, through contact with nongovernment agencies, Advisory Committee members, and selected service providers known to the researcher.

Three youth dialogue groups, consisting of 19 individuals, (15 Aboriginal and 4 non-Aboriginal youth) were conducted. The participants in the dialogue groups included young offenders presently on court orders and reclaimed youth working as peer counsellors and/or tutors.

Interviews with youth/reclaimed youth and dialogue groups ranged from 40 to 90 minutes.

Service Providers and Administrators

Twenty-one people representing police and government (provincial/municipal) and nongovernment front-line service providers/administrators participated in individual, in-depth interviews. Interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. This group of service providers and administrators consisted of both males and females of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry.

Informal individual interviews were held with a cross-section of representatives from human-service agencies, including members of the Advisory Committee. These discussions were not taped and were not used as data. Rather, they were used to obtain a better understanding of the overall context of the human-service sector in Regina.

Focus Group Participants

Two focus groups were conducted that included administrators, alternative school personnel, counsellors, and community coordinators representing the K to 12 educational system. A third focus group included front-line service providers and administrators from nongovernment agencies. In total, 18 people participated in these focus groups.

Survey Respondents

In addition to the above, persons from government, nongovernment, and school boards responded to the survey. (See Table 1 for survey distribution and Appendix A for the Survey.)

SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Names of potential study participants for individual interviews and focus or dialogue groups were obtained from both formal and informal sources. Sources included Advisory Committee members, persons working in relevant education systems, government, and nongovernment agencies, as well as members of the Project Team.

All the youth interviewed fit the definitional categories established through the literature review and through discussions with the Advisory Committee. The decision as to how many youth interviews to conduct was based on the available resources, as well as consideration of what would constitute a representative sample. It was agreed that approximately a dozen, in-depth

interviews would yield this representation, if this sample included persons representative of all the established criteria.

An additional six, older youth were added to this sample when it became clear that reclaimed youth had valuable experiences to offer.

Table 1

Regina's Hidden Youth Survey Distribution Summary (N = 105)

Survey(s)	n ^a
Distribution	
Government agencies	16
Nongovernment agencies	61
Other (religious organizations, separate & public school boards)	28
TOTAL	105
Returned	
Government agencies	8
Nongovernment agencies	18
Other (religious organizations, separate & public school boards)	11
Unusable (incomplete, not applicable)	6
TOTAL^b	43

^anumber of surveys.

^bOf this total, 37 were used for purposes of analysis.

CHARACTERISTICS/CRITERIA USED IN SAMPLING DECISIONS

- a range of youth from 12 to 18 years of age
- rarely in school or not attending school at all
- living dangerous or damaging lifestyles
- live at home but spend most of their time on the street and are involved with street culture
- avail themselves of services designed for youth at risk
- live in marginal situations (e.g., sometimes at home, sometimes with friends or relatives, assigned to foster care but continue to run away, moves between city and reserve, alternative housing such as safehouses)
- do not take advantage of services available
- may have been in custody at some time but not at the time of the interview
- representation of male and female participants
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

The sample size for the in-depth interviews with service providers was based on two main considerations. These included the criteria established for relevant service providers and human-service administrators and the resources available. The criteria for informed service providers/administrators were related to the degree of contact of the individual agency or department with street youth/youth at risk and to the unique perspectives on street youth of agencies that play specialized roles. The third focus group was conducted to broaden the representation of the human-service sector and to gain a better understanding of the local context.

The survey population included all government and nongovernment departments identified as having relevant experiences with street youth/youth at risk. The initial mailing in November 1998 was distributed to 47 government and nongovernment departments and agencies. A second mailing to the K to 12 education systems was sent out in February 1999 to persons internally identified by the respective systems. A third and final distribution was made to agencies that were identified on the returned surveys as providing services in the human-service sector relevant to the focus of the study. A total of 105 surveys were distributed and 43 were returned with 37 being suitable for analysis purposes which constituted a return rate of 41%.

TIMELINES

August – November 1998

- creation of Hidden Youth Project Advisory Committee
- design and dissemination of survey for service providers and teachers.

November 1998 – February 1999

- interviews with service providers, street youth/youth at risk, and reclaimed youth
- focus groups with relevant public and separate school board employees (teachers, counsellors, community school coordinators, administrators)
- informal meetings between project coordinator and relevant members of the community to gain a better understanding of the Regina context
- analysis of surveys returned to date; preliminary analysis of interviews.

March – April 1999

- focus groups with service providers, police, and relevant community members (focus of questions took into account the findings from data collected to that point)
- dialogue groups with youth from selected agencies that work with these youth (focus of questions took into account the findings from data collected to that point)
- dissemination of additional surveys as needed
- preliminary analysis of the data collected in March
- development of initial findings
- discussion of first interim report with Advisory Committee.

End of April 1999

- completion of data collection and analysis
- initial development of recommendations.

- May 1999:* seminar with youth and front-line workers.
- June 1999:* second interim report and working meetings with Advisory Committee.
- July 1999:* final report.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The summary of relevant literature is organized to reflect three main areas of the literature that were reviewed for the Regina Hidden Youth study. These three areas include (a) current research related to street youth, (b) relevant demographic material, and (c) literature related to the larger social context, including historical influences and cross-cultural factors.

CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH RELATED TO STREET YOUTH

Current Canadian, provincial, and local research that focused on street youth/youth at risk was extensively reviewed. The majority of these reports summarized research undertaken in the 90s, particularly within the last 4 years. The analysis of these reports revealed a number of themes and findings that held true across settings and studies. The main areas of commonality included the:

- difficulty of establishing exact numbers of youth living a street lifestyle
- antecedent circumstances that increase the likelihood of youth adopting a street lifestyle
- major risks related to life on the streets
- most pressing needs of street youth
- challenges presently facing service providers and the major challenges in the development and maintenance of programs
- qualities and elements of "good" programs.

The findings from Regina's Hidden Youth Project were very similar to those of the other studies reviewed. Rather than presenting these common findings twice, relevant findings from other current studies are discussed along with the Regina findings.

Findings unique to the Regina study and/or those given limited treatment in other contemporary research became the focus of a further literature review. A major difference between the Regina study and those studies undertaken in other Canadian provinces is the composition of the street youth population. The majority of Regina's street youth/youth at risk are of Aboriginal ancestry. Our demographic research focused largely on significant aspects of the First Nations and Métis populations as compared to the general population in Saskatchewan. As well, the additional literature reviewed was largely related to Aboriginal issues and concerns.

RELEVANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

In recent years considerable attention has been given to gathering and collecting statistical data to better understand the potential magnitude of the street youth phenomenon. While the primary orientation of this study has been of a qualitative nature, certain demographic information is provided that could prove helpful in assessing and evaluating the Regina context.

The primary demographic feature distinguishing Saskatchewan from other Canadian provinces is the high ratio of people of Aboriginal ancestry in the general population. This factor, combined with the socioeconomic status of most Aboriginal people, has resulted in high numbers of Aboriginal youth being placed at risk.

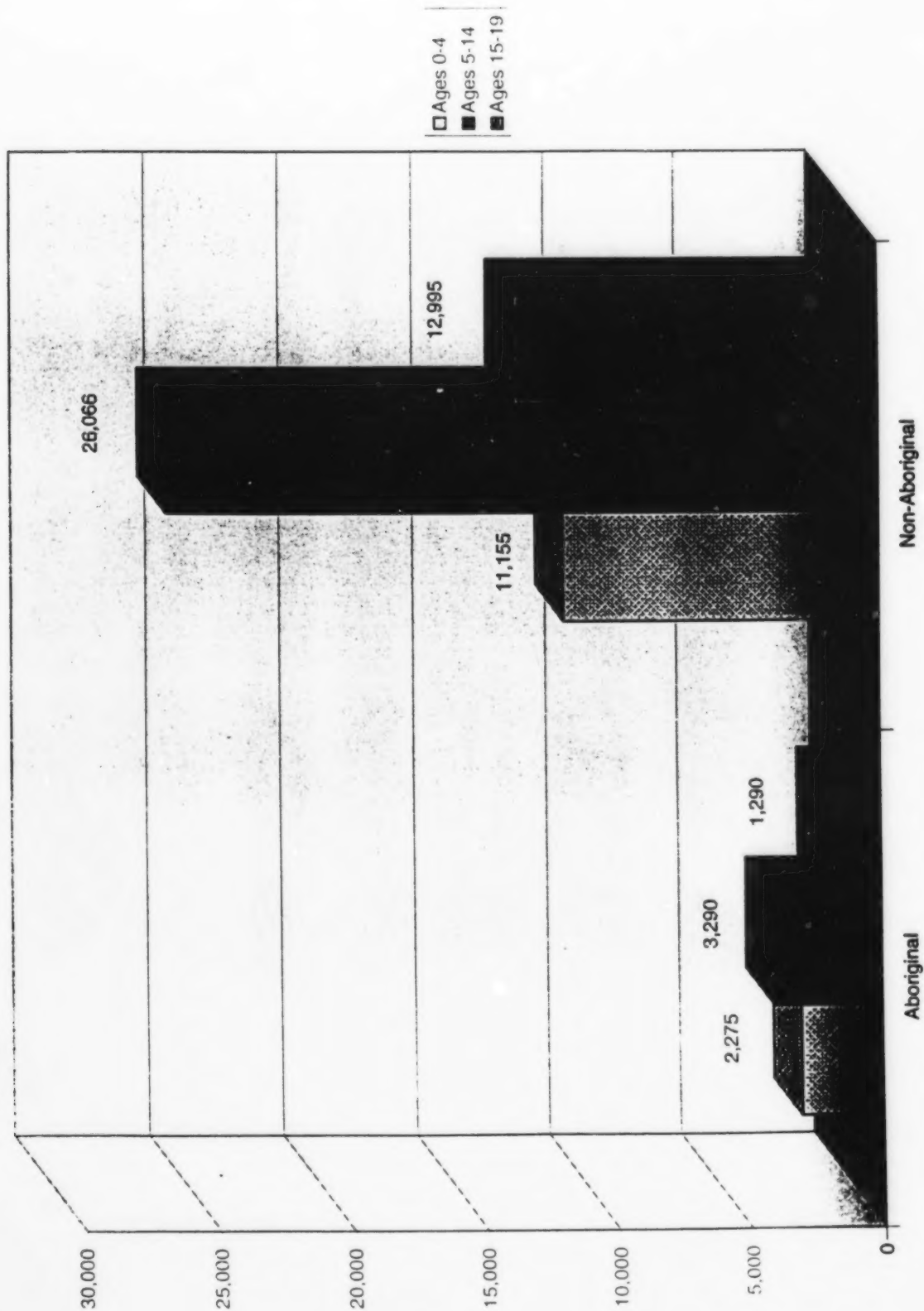
Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population makes up 11.4% of the total provincial population, second only to Manitoba (11.7%). A comparison with other Canadian provinces reveals the following statistics: Alberta, 4.6%; British Columbia, 3.8%; Ontario, 1.3%; and Quebec, 1% (Statistics Canada, 1996 Census, Aboriginal data). The 1996 census also revealed that 50% of Aboriginal people now live in cities and towns. (See *Saskatchewan Education Indicators*, 1998.)

Two factors that seriously impede the Aboriginal community from moving out of extreme poverty are attained levels of education and lack of employment opportunities. See Figures 1, 2, and 3 that follow. These factors are discussed in more detail in the following section.

LITERATURE RELATED TO HISTORICAL, SOCIOECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL FACTORS

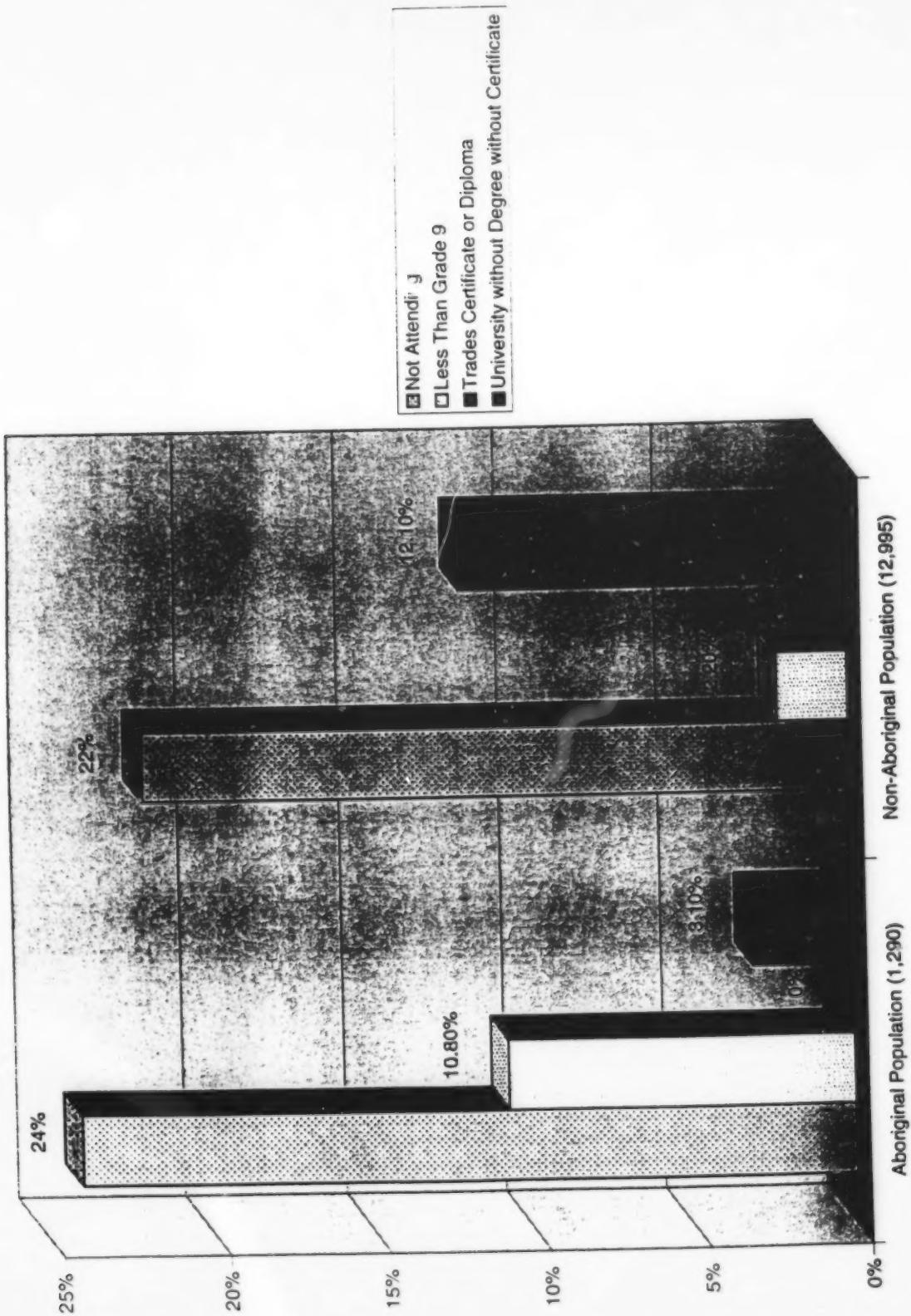
A major assumption underlying all social research is that human behaviour is neither the sole result of genetic endowment nor is it simply arbitrary. Rather, social research begins with the belief that significant aspects of human behaviour can be explained by examining the personal and social contexts in which the behaviour takes place. The majority of contemporary studies of street youth examine factors in the personal contexts of street youth but offer little discussion of the impact of the larger social and economic context on the street youth phenomenon in general. This more limited focus is understandable, given the difficulty of initiating structural change, but it is inadequate for our purposes for several reasons.

First, it is clear in the Regina findings that significant aspects of the personal contexts of the street youth/youth at risk are related to factors in the larger social context (i.e., racism, poverty, unemployment opportunities, gender). Further, it is clear that solutions and changes that might improve the quality of life of street youth or prevent an increase of this phenomenon are dependent to a great extent on larger structural changes. As well, the largely Aboriginal makeup of Regina's street youth population makes it important that the historical roots underlying the present circumstances of Aboriginal peoples be examined. This is particularly necessary in a study where racism is considered to play a role. Finally, it has been shown that the larger social and economic context significantly affects the work lives of service providers in the Regina study and the quality of social programs related to youth at risk and their families. Thus, in the



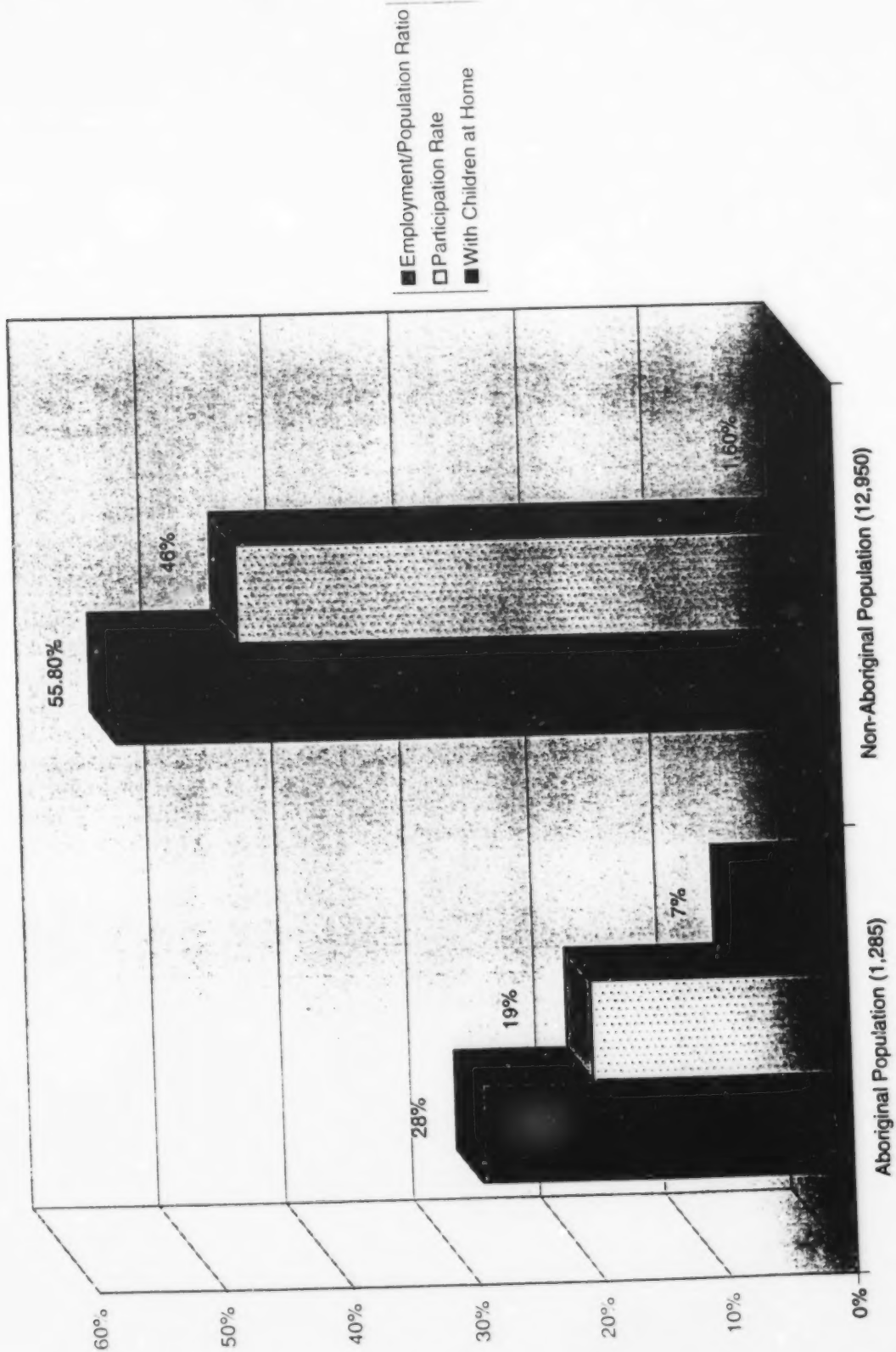
Statistics Canada 1996 Census

Figure 1. Age characteristics of Regina's youth population, ages 0-19.



Statistics Canada 1996 Census

Figure 2. School attendance/nonattendance of Regina's youth population, ages 15-19.



Statistics Canada 1996 Census

Figure 3. Labor force activity of Regina's youth population, ages 15-19.

literature review that follows, emphasis has been placed on examination of the impact of historical and socioeconomic factors on the street youth phenomenon.

Culturally sensitive programming in relation to people of Aboriginal ancestry was an added area of further review. This was undertaken because all current studies consistently recommend that programs which are developed need to be culturally sensitive and/or culturally relevant. However, these studies offered little guidance as to what this might entail. Literature was examined that focused on the elements and qualities of culturally sensitive programming, particularly in relation to First Nations and Métis peoples. The summary of this literature will be included in the study's conclusions and recommendations.

HISTORICAL FACTORS: ROOTS OF DISENFRANCHISEMENT

A brief summary of Aboriginal history since colonization and its effect on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons has been included to contextualize more adequately the present circumstances of street youth of First Nations or Métis ancestry. It will also serve as a background for recommendations related to the accurate portrayal of Aboriginal persons, historical events, and to the development of responses to the street youth phenomena at a number of levels (i.e., community, provincial, national).

Extensive evidence exists of the destructive effects of colonization and assimilation policies on Canada's First Nations peoples (see, for example; Adams, 1989; Bourgeault, Broad, Brown, & Foster, 1992; Friesen, 1997; O'Meara & West, 1996). There is widespread agreement from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives that these negative effects endure to the present and are visible and easily traced to their historical roots in colonial policies and practices, many which stemmed from a belief in the inherent inferiority of Aboriginal persons and cultures.

Lack of accurate historical knowledge contributes to the persistence of racism. Examination of extensive evidence clearly demonstrates that the present adverse circumstances of Canada's Aboriginal peoples can be attributed to historical and not genetic factors. However, racist theories persist and continue to damage the self-esteem and sense of identity of individuals of Aboriginal ancestry. This bias is compounded by an historical record that, until recently, was largely written and interpreted from a European perspective.

The native people in a colony are not allowed a valid interpretation of their history, because the conquered do not write their own history. They must endure a history that shames them, destroys their confidence, and causes them to reject their heritage.

(Adams, 1989, p. 43)

Evidence also exists that non-Aboriginal persons do not have an accurate understanding of the treatment of First Nations and Métis persons by Canadian governments. For example, a recent study of the views of non-Aboriginal, preservice teachers at the University of Regina (Finney & Orr, 1995) revealed large gaps in their knowledge of Aboriginal history and many negative views about Aboriginal persons. Racism, both institutional and personal, cannot be ignored as a continuing negative factor in the lives of First Nations and Métis persons living in Saskatchewan.

Results of disenfranchisement. Colonization and subsequent government assimilation policies and practices resulted in the disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples throughout North and South America. The knowledge and structures of their cultures that had been accumulated and passed along through oral traditions over the millennia, were replaced by institutional structures designed to enculturate and assimilate. Aboriginal societies lost their languages, land base, means of livelihood, traditions, and fundamental sense of worth (Bourgeault et al., 1992). The social problems caused by the loss of cultural autonomy and the breakdown of family and community life continue to plague and haunt First Nations and Métis communities.

While many First Nations and Métis individuals and communities have resisted, and continue to resist, negative portrayal of their cultures and abilities and are attempting to address the social ills described above, change is understandably slow and the setbacks many. A continued emphasis on procedures and policies that perceive social and historically created problems as being individual and local, only serves to increase the alienation and relative powerlessness of Aboriginal communities. Adams further argues that such policies and practices also hinder them "in perceiving reality critically" (1989, p. 155).

Aboriginal people/Youth and poverty. One of the most devastating and visible results of the disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples has been that of overwhelming poverty. The Aboriginal population, as compared to the non-Aboriginal population, represents a disproportionately high number of families in poverty. Quantitative statistical evidence continues to be amassed in an effort to convince funding agencies and governments of the need for increased support for victims of poverty. Each subsequent report compiles statistics that demonstrate that poverty is growing in society, in general, and especially in the Aboriginal community, and that the poorest families are led by single, female parents (Hall, 1999).

Snider (1996) questions whether the use of statistics to measure and document poverty is a true search for solutions or rather, is it a way to "protect us from the truth and to insulate us against feeling?" (p. 37). The statistical findings of "the exact number, the standard deviation all take on a life of their own, with their own relentless logic carrying us further and further from the living despair of real, poor, persons struggling to live in this 'land of plenty'" (p. 38).

Snider (1996) claims that colonialism is not simply something that has affected people in the past but, in fact, it remains a crucial part of the present. He argues that poverty is not an inevitability and that the root of poverty lies not with the poor and their failings or inadequacies, but with the capitalist market economy. He concludes by saying "A country which places profits before human needs cannot hope to eliminate poverty" (p. 37). Supporters of this argument are amassing new evidence monthly as the effects of global economic practices and policies are being felt (Clarke & Barlow, 1997; Green, 1996).

THE LARGER SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

The challenges faced by children and families at risk are related to the social and economic structures of Canadian society and the prevailing values/attitudes and priorities of dominant social groups (Adams, 1989; Friesen, 1997).

Global economics. Considerable agreement exists that the values and priorities of the dominant social order revolve around the concept of an ever-expanding global market economy – an economic system that erodes national sovereignty and constitutional rights (Chomsky, 1999; Clarke & Barlow, 1997; Green, 1996).

Transnational corporations, operating outside the sphere of nation/state constitutional restrictions, are increasingly lobbying national and provincial governments for deregulated legislative policies, that is, for policies that place fewer constraints on their operations and “conform to the interests of transnational capital” (Green, 1996, p. 113). The result is that state sovereignty is eroded and domestic economies are pressured to introduce fiscal restraints and cuts to social spending as a means of remaining globally competitive. Common domestic government reactions to and subsequent effects of globalization are:

- debt reduction (presented as essential to being economically competitive)
- reduced social spending (presented as a means to income tax reduction for the middle and working classes)
- social programs increasingly portrayed as benefiting a marginalized sector that does not contribute significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
- devaluation of the family unit and the individual, other than as workers and consumers
- a growing disparity between the richest and the poorest groups in society.

Globalization is also felt to be “a root cause of the increasing feminization of poverty everywhere. This violates human rights, the integrity of our ecosystems and poses serious threats to our health” (Non-Governmental Organizations, Beijing Declaration, 1996).

Alienation of Youth in a Socially Toxic Society². Just as the physical environment has become vulnerable to the forces of production and “progress,” so, too, has the social environment been adversely affected. Garbarino (1995) describes a “socially toxic environment” as characterized by:

- disruption of relationships
- economic disparity/inequality through lack of opportunity and training
- adverse effects of dominant themes in the media on children/youth, for example, unrealistic portrayal of the effects and consequences of violence
- consumerism (as discussed above)
- lack of moral/spiritual/cultural leadership in families, communities and governments.

The recent shooting rampages of and by students in high schools in Denver, Colorado, and Taber, Alberta, are dramatic and devastating illustrations of a socially toxic environment. Garbarino contends that large schools restrict the possibility of developing strong or positive relationships among students, especially marginal students, and that in large schools many feel increasingly isolated and alienated from their peers. Bronfenbrenner (cited in Brendtro et al., 1990) furthers this argument by describing the circumstances of growing numbers of youth in North America: “To be alienated is to lack a sense of belonging, to feel cut off from family, friends, school or work – the four worlds of childhood” (p. 6).

² This concept has been taken from *Raising Children in a Socially Toxic Environment* by James Garbarino.

A contributing factor to alienation is the emphasis on image and material possessions. Garbarino (1995) claims that contemporary society has substituted the "social conventions of fashion and cynicism for the enduring values of caring and spirituality" (p. 121). He argues:

Unless we reach them [youth] with healing experiences and offer them a moral and political framework within which to process their experiences, traumatized kids are likely to be drawn to values and ideologies that legitimize and reward their aggression, their rage, their fear, and the hateful cynicism that they feed upon in our culture. (p. 126)

All "classes" of young people have been affected by this social toxicity and are increasingly put at risk and vulnerable to the values, pressures, and attitudes engendered by the emerging world economic order (Green, 1996). Green asserts that the result of this ideological orientation "is the erosion of the foundation of relationship [and that] the priority of family, of community, is lost to the priority of individual responsiveness to the imperatives of the labour market" (p. 113).

Boredom and meaninglessness plague many young people's lives, as little is required of or expected from them, except as consumers. An unending and vast array of goods and services are promoted and advertised as being the substance of a worthwhile existence. For many young people, work/job priorities often preclude them from participating in more developmentally appropriate activities (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Webber, 1991).

Deprived of opportunities for genuine productivity, lured into consumptive roles, young people come to believe that their lives make little difference to the world. (Brendtro et al., 1990, p. 29)

Unequal opportunities and devaluing of individuals. Families and youth at risk have significantly less access and fewer opportunities than the dominant societal groups to participate in the labour market. One aspect of their restricted participation is attributed to the continued existence of discriminatory practices and policies (Adams, 1989; Garbarino, 1995).

Little value is placed on nonmonetarized sectors of the economy such as homemakers and volunteers. Despite being faced with multiple challenges and limited options, single-parent families are especially stigmatized by their social position and often become the targets of criticism and derision by the taxpaying public. Many single-parent/absent-father families struggle to provide the most basic of needs while at the same time feeling pressured to provide high-priced "brand name" goods for themselves and their children (Garbarino, 1995; Webber, 1991).

Mother-led families in particular reel from the impact of overwork, underpay, high costs, and the paucity of affordable, adequate childcare. (Webber, p. 36)

Risk factors for youth. A social structure built on the concept of consumption develops an equally destructive concept of disposability. Just as goods that no longer work are considered disposable, so also with people who have been marginalized by the society. The results of social toxicity include a litany of risk factors familiar to the human-services sector - factors that contribute to the general demoralization of families and communities. These risk factors include:

- absent fathers (single-parent families, usually teenage mothers)
- poverty; economic pressures and despair brought about by a future envisioned as one without meaningful employment opportunities
- addictions
- poor physical health
- educational failure
- adverse effects of television/media - including positive portrayal of the use of violence on television - shaping of youth's identity around appearance rather than personal qualities, the reduction of face-to-face interaction with others, negative perceptions of the at risk community by the dominant culture
- racism.

Brendtro et al. (1990) conclude that "we can no longer afford the economic drain of disposable people" (p. 3).

It is the accumulation of these risk factors that impede appropriate development for the most vulnerable youth and "undermines their self-confidence and feelings of self-worth [and eventually] erodes childhood itself" (Garbarino, p. 6). Solutions to the myriad of problems facing street youth/youth at risk are related to the reduction or elimination of these same factors. Strategies that contribute to this end are discussed further in the conclusions and recommendations.

FINDINGS

The findings of the Regina Hidden Youth Project have been organized into three sections to reflect the research objectives for Phase 1 of the study. These findings have been compared with those of other relevant studies, as well as with themes from related literature.

The objectives of the project were to:

- determine the prevalence of youth on the streets and not attending school
- explore the physical, social, educational, and family needs of these young people
- identify issues/problems related to effective and coordinated service provision.

In the discussion that follows, any differences between the findings of the Regina Hidden Youth Project and other studies and relevant literature will be identified and discussed.

OBJECTIVE 1: PREVALENCE OF YOUTH ON THE STREETS

1. Estimating prevalence in terms of numbers of youth on the street was not the main issue for front-line workers and service providers. They were more concerned about meeting the needs of a large population at risk than obtaining numbers of those who fit the criteria for "youth on the streets."

It was very difficult to get accurate statistical data concerning the prevalence of youth either living on the streets or in marginal situations. Interviews with youth, front-line service providers, administrators, teachers, and police did not provide the project with any significant information concerning numbers. Those interviewed did not consider numbers to be the primary issue. For example, in response to the question of prevalence, one service provider asked, *Why do you need to know, isn't one [youth] enough?*³

A participant who had previously worked in a provincial role spoke of the difficulties in determining numbers of youth in trouble or "at risk." She stated it was very difficult to get any *hard and fast data*. Her department relied on information from police sources and outreach programs.

Youth Prostitution. In reference to youth prostitution in Regina, estimates, gathered from interviews and previous Regina research studies, ranged from 40 to 130 youth. Some sources indicated that youth involvement in prostitution ranged from *occasional* to *full time*. Several youth and front-line service providers did confirm that some youth are as young as 8 years old and information from the Regina Public Health District indicated it is not uncommon to see a mother on one street corner and her daughter on the adjacent.

High numbers of youth living dangerous or damaging lifestyles. An educator estimated that of 500 students she had interviewed *one-on-one* over the last 1½ years, 490 were either living dangerous lifestyles or were living in a home where people were living a dangerous and damaging lifestyle.

They are affected by it firsthand, either by extended family members . . . or by individuals who do live dangerous or damaging lifestyles.

The range of lifestyles span a continuum from

nutritional needs not being met and issues of poverty to . . . getting involved with life on the street and getting involved with drugs and alcohol.

She concluded by saying, *I don't know if that's a growing number or if it's my own awareness [that has grown].*

The most common response to the question of prevalence from youth and service providers alike was *lots*. One youth indicated that there were generally eight or nine in her usual crowd of youth "hanging out." [We would] *go to the park and sit around and go hang around at the mall* [during and/or after school]. Numbers also vary considerably with the changing seasons, although the Project's youth researcher observed female youth "working the streets" on some of the coldest winter nights (-35 Celsius).

Most participants simply did not respond to the question of prevalence or said they did not have any idea about how many young people might be on the streets. However, several participants were not hesitant to say that the numbers are increasing and that the average age

³All quotations from youth, service providers, and administrators are italicized.

of youth spending time on the street is getting younger. A local educator indicated that there are more and more alternative-education programs being developed in western Canada and reported that the program she works with is *getting a greater number of younger students than we have had in the past*. She explained that,

We never have enough openings. If you have one opening, you will have three people trying to get it.

Another alternative-education program respondent said, *I probably have anywhere between 20 to 25 applications sitting in my filing cabinet that I will go through on a weekly basis, sometimes every two weeks.*

Outreach programs attempt to meet the needs of youth *on their own turf* and are sometimes overwhelmed with what they encounter.

We see probably three or four new clients every day. That's new needle-exchange people, that's people using injection drug use, that's not including the new sex-trade workers that we are seeing on the streets, either, or the new youth. So, everything is actually increasing. It's quite a shocking thing that's going on. (outreach service provider)

Service providers showed greater concern for the needs of children and youth at risk, indicating that the term *at risk* described most of the populations they served. Whether or not the children/youth were literally on the streets was not as urgent as their concern for the serious challenges these children and youth were facing.

2. **The varied and elusive nature of the street youth population in Regina makes it virtually impossible to specify the exact numbers of youth on the streets or living a street lifestyle.**

Two primary factors that make counting street youth populations extremely difficult include:

- the transitory nature of their lifestyle (there is considerable movement in and out and between and among a number of locations in the city, as well as between city and reserve)
- the fact that you cannot find them is because they do not want to be found.

It is simply not in their best interest to be identified by anyone except a few street *friends*. Many have been involved in criminal activity such as shoplifting, breaking and entering (B & Es), and so forth, and identification would lead to incarceration. Others are afraid of being *scooped* by Social Services and returned to or placed in foster care.

Related literature. A report from a project conducted in Saskatoon (1993) concluded that:

It is the case with all of the research we reviewed that no reliable estimates exist of the size of the street youth population. The size of any segment of the street youth

population could not be inferred with complete confidence from any of these studies. (Brannigan & Caputo, 1993)

Aboriginal people, particularly in urban centers, have often learned to be "invisible" and carry an extreme distrust for government systems. As a result, problems can remain "hidden" until they reach crisis proportions (*Aboriginal Children*, 1999).

3. The specification of numbers, in terms of the street youth population, is partly contingent on how *street youth* is defined.

The meaning of *youth* and *living on the street* can be broad or narrow, single or multidimensional. Visible manifestations of the street-youth problem are very complex and no one individual or group has the whole picture. The Regina Hidden Youth Project developed a profile of characteristics/criteria of youth for the purposes of this study. This profile was constructed from relevant literature and advice from the Advisory Committee. The youth interviewed for this project represented all the characteristics of the profile established for the project (see p. 5, Sampling Procedures).

Runaways. The most common definitional characteristic of youth interviewed in the Regina project was that of *runaways*. Runaways are youth who absent themselves from their legal residence without permission. All youth interviewed had at one time left their homes/extended family/foster care without permission and were, or had been, "on the run" for anywhere from 2 months to 4 years.

A 16-year-old female related how she moved from panhandling to living in a house with other girls. Panhandling had dried up and she had become quite despondent, *really scared*, and talked with some other girls she had met on the street about *pulling suicide*. She told them she needed a place to stay and they took her in. She continued:

They had lots of runaways staying there. They would have to pay them money somehow . . . pay them 10 bucks, \$15, \$20 . . . whatever they could get. They would have to pay the girl. She had about seven girls staying there in that one house, plus her and her kid . . . and her boyfriend. [The boyfriend's friends would] come over to drink with all the girls that were living there.

For the youth who stayed there, life in such a place meant paying a price for eluding apprehension by authorities: being open to victimization.

Victimized Youth. The Regina study revealed there are youth living in circumstances that the literature describes as *victimized* or *captive youth* (Brannigan & Caputo, 1997; Caputo, Weiler, & Kelly, 1994). Service providers in Regina are aware of youth that are harboured by *players*. Players are most commonly young to middle-aged males, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who provide a shelter for youth, mostly females, and expect or charge the youth rent. The youth often become bound and indebted to the player as most of their "disposable

income," which is derived from stealing and/or prostitution, goes to supporting their drug habit.

There are kids we know . . . [who are] in with some very unsavory adults that are harbouring them. (service provider)

A player is sometimes part of the extended family or is the live-in partner of one of the youth. For example,

I never really talk to any of my friends. Well, I never seen [sic] any of them for . . . about 5 months now. I just stay in. I can't go out and visit my friends 'cause he gets mad and he thinks I cheat on him. (15-year-old female living with a 27-year-old physically abusive male)

Service providers, generally, were not concerned about a rigorous definition of street youth, youth at risk, or other such categorizations. Again, their primary concern was how to better serve and meet the needs of the youth they encounter.

4. The prevalence of street youth is linked to the economic, political, and social factors of the larger community.

There are a number of social conditions affecting the street youth phenomenon that are produced and created by the larger socioeconomic context. These conditions have a major impact on youth at risk, especially Aboriginal youth. Three main aspects of the larger socioeconomic context that work against such youth include:

- widespread cuts to social programs
- increased discrepancies between high- and low-income families
- disparity in employment opportunities between social and cultural groups, racism, and discrimination in the labour and housing market.

Cuts to social programs further increase the struggle of low-income families. The results of such cuts include growing

- welfare dependency and extreme poverty
- poor housing conditions
- discrimination against and mistrust of the poorest sector of the population
- high rates of unemployment.

In turn, these conditions contribute to a further deterioration of the quality of everyday life for many youth and create yet another level of severe problems such as:

- drug and alcohol abuse and addiction
- family violence and abuse.

There was extensive evidence that youth interviewed for the Regina project either had been or are affected by the conditions and resulting problems outlined above.

Racism continues to affect Aboriginal youth. All Aboriginal youth interviewed in this study spoke of having experienced racism (both subtle and overt) that ranged from personal/individual encounters to incidents in institutional settings. Also, there is evidence that youth, in general, are experiencing prejudice and are increasingly being negatively portrayed by the media. Peer counsellors from an NGO lobbied the local media to present a more balanced picture of youth/youth activities in the city but were disappointed and discouraged as they were politely listened to; however, *nothing changed*.

A young male related an incident where he and his cousin were stopped and questioned by police when walking in the Cathedral area. The police wanted to know if the boys were carrying screwdrivers. The boys said this was not an unusual occurrence, although they felt intimidated by the experience.

A reclaimed youth spoke of an experience involving the city police. He was pulled over by the police and instructed to *put his hands on the steering wheel*.

They took me and my buddy out and they handcuffed me and said, "You guys are in a stolen car." I was telling them, "It's my mother's car." [The police said] "No, no," then three other [police] cars came and they eventually ended up letting us go because they found out that it was my mother's car. They were really aggressive. They basically told me, "You're lying, you always lie."

Several youth spoke of having experienced racism in the school setting from both fellow students and teachers. This was more prevalent in settings where Aboriginal youth were in the minority. A reclaimed youth recalled an experience that is still very vivid in her memory.

One of the things that sticks out most in my head . . . [it] was in Grade 3. We were taught to spell "arithmetic" [by saying] "A red Indian thought he might eat tobacco in church." I can remember the day she told us that. It was so embarrassing. I felt like crawling under the desk because all the kids laughed and pointed at us. We were the only two Indian kids in class. (Reclaimed youth)

Ms. Peabody was the only one that was racist. She would make the people that were Native sit on one side of the room, in different parts of the room.

Interviewer: Why?

Some . . . white kids didn't like Indians and they thought they would get cheeky to them if they [the Indians] sat by them.

She indicated that the prevalence of such incidents affected, and continues to affect, her sense of identity and self-esteem.

Several youth spoke of constantly being watched by clerks and store owners saying *they just look at us like we are going to steal or something*. An Aboriginal youth who was working at a large department store chain in the city related an incident connected with instructions that she and another Aboriginal employee were given in a general staff meeting. She began by talking about her work atmosphere.

They made me and this other Aboriginal girl do everything that they didn't want to do. And, this one day . . . [in a staff meeting] it was during Christmas, they told us to watch all the Indians in the store. There was about 75 people in the room, and they must have seen us. [They were instructed to] report them [Indians] every time we see one of them walk into the store.

Related literature. The literature also suggests that the composition of the homeless population is changing as a result of such conditions. Brannigan and Caputo (1992) argue that the homeless population in Canada has "changed substantially during the past decade with young people constituting an increasingly important part of this group" (p. 16).

Poverty affects Aboriginal people disproportionately. The latest Statistics Canada information reveals that the number of low-income families is rising and that people of Aboriginal ancestry make up a substantial segment of the low-income population.

A report issued by the Economic Council of Canada, *The New Face of Poverty* (1992), estimates "that as many as one in three Canadians will be poor at some time in their working life." A Saskatchewan Education publication, *On Course* (February 1999), indicates that about 50% of Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan are living in poverty. Furthermore, it includes statistics from a National Council of Welfare publication that indicate "21% of children (one in five - over 55,000 children) in Saskatchewan were reported to be living in poverty in 1996. For children of single-parent mothers, the poverty rate is 69%." (See *Saskatchewan Education Indicators*, 1998.)

5. **Evidence exists from a number of sources that the majority of runaways and street youth in Regina are Aboriginal and that the majority of these Aboriginal youth come from low-income families who are facing a multitude of challenges.**

The researcher responsible for individual youth interviews confirmed it was not difficult to find youth of Aboriginal ancestry considered at risk or living a street lifestyle. The researcher indicated that it was difficult to find a non-Aboriginal male street youth. Of the 37 youth/reclaimed youth interviewed for this project, 28 were of Aboriginal ancestry and 9 were non-Aboriginal. Findings from other sources in the Regina study indicated the high prevalence of Aboriginal youth on the street as compared to non-Aboriginal youth.

Our client base is at 90%+ First Nations. (a survey respondent and an outreach program)

Related literature. A literature review conducted by the Institute of Urban Studies (1997), University of Winnipeg, confirmed that the majority of "runaways and street youth in Prairie cities are Aboriginal, with more females than males." The review indicates that the Aboriginal population is more likely to experience "higher birth and death rates, shorter life expectancies, a higher proportion of one-parent families, lower levels of education and income, and higher unemployment and poverty levels" (Beavis, Klos, Carter, & Douchant, On-line).

OBJECTIVE 2: NEEDS OF STREET YOUTH/YOUTH AT RISK

They just don't want somebody else in their life who doesn't care. (service provider)

1. In general, street youth can be distinguished from youth at risk by the extent to which their physical or basic needs are unmet. Youth living on the street, or in marginal situations related to street life, lack consistent and reliable provision of safe shelter, food, health care, and clothing.

Interviewer: What was a typical day on the streets like for you?
Just try to find money and food.

I: Where did you sleep?
I had a lot of friends [whose] parents were alcoholics and addicts and they didn't really give a shit if a kid crashed on their couch for the night or even a couple nights. I would stay at that place for a while, and then once that place got sick of you, you had to move on. (18-year-old white male describing his experiences on the streets at 14)

I: Where did you sleep?
We would sleep at my friend's house or, once in a while, we would sleep in an abandoned house or something. (15-year-old Aboriginal male)

A 16-year-old female youth talked about being forced to work the street by her live-in boyfriend to *get money . . . so we would go and do little cheap scores.*

I: How much money would you get?
About 80 bucks, a hundred bucks, sometimes a little bit more.

I: What would you do with the money?
We'd usually buy something to eat and then get high.

An educator related a story of having challenged a 15-year-old male to a race up the school stairs. He had difficulty keeping up with her.

He shared with me that he had a vitamin deficiency and he had to be going to the doctor for Vitamin B shots because he is malnourished. He is suffering from the effects of not eating properly.

2. Many of the basic needs of street youth/youth at risk change with their changing circumstances. Other needs, such as those related to social, emotional, and spiritual supports, are pervasive over time and call for long-term supports.

Most of the youth interviewed had emotional and spiritual needs related to the adverse circumstances in which they grew up. Many had run from their home situation because

of domestic violence and abuse. Initial *runs* might last for a couple of days with the youth *hanging out* with friends until things quieted down at home.

The physical ones [needs] are the easy ones to spot.

The social needs are more difficult for outsiders to understand. For example,

Not being socialized . . . to know how to go to a counter and ask for what you need. Just not knowing how to find one's way and not [having] an adult to help them, to show them the way. (service provider)

[We need] to start practicing what we preach and stop putting on Band-Aids . . . If you take this person and allow them to take some steps on the path, what have you really done for them if the supports behind them are nowhere near that path? (service provider)

I think for families that have long-standing issues, 2 months, 3 months, 6 months isn't long enough. And I know the goal is to empower families, not create dependency on services long-term but, maybe, we still think too much in the immediacy. (service provider)

A dialogue participant related a personal experience regarding a treatment program for her mother.

My mom was a severe alcoholic where she just wouldn't stop; you couldn't make her stop. I have a younger brother and two younger sisters, and we were taken and put in foster care. She went through a treatment centre and then she had to come out and she had to be clean for a few months. They gave us back [to the mother] after 7 months. She was sober for 9 months and then went back to drinking again. Just sending them for a 30-day program and say, "Okay, get better" and "You come out and you're going to be okay," like, that's not good. (Aboriginal youth)

3. Spiritual needs are viewed as a central aspect of the street youth phenomenon.

One service provider who was interviewed felt that the spiritual well being is the first support that crumbles for people at risk. This individual works within the First Nations community and is a former street person.

Of all the abuses, I think the first is cultural. It's like when you [first begin to] go down the recovery [road] your spiritual starts to suffer first and you [can] drop further and further into addiction. One of the [burdens] . . . a lot of my people carry . . . they will avoid these things because the shame is so high, they carry this deep shame about race and culture and all these kinds of things. Those things need to be addressed. (service provider)

A reclaimed youth and two service providers believe that emotional and spiritual needs are the main elements lacking for youth at risk.

Trying to be equals in our society, trying to be proud of who they are. It's still a big challenge . . . A lot of us think that . . . now with all of these things that have happened with First Nations people that in 1998 it's okay, that our youth will have a much better road to go down. They don't. They actually have even more challenges. So they are faced with . . . one of the biggest challenges . . . identity and racism. It's not a lot different than it was when I was a kid. It's just [that] back then we didn't talk about it. You knew you didn't have any self-esteem, you didn't like yourself, but you didn't know why. Nowadays kids know why. (reclaimed youth)

What I am very concerned about is the emotional and spiritual gaps . . . the depression I see, the hopelessness, the fear of the future. (service provider)

There's a loss of faith. It's not a vacuum, spiritually, in terms of the basic constructs being there: the belief in the eagle, the belief in the spirits, the belief in the hereafter, the belief in moral living. All of that is there, or at least it's spoken of and it's spoken about by Elders. But there is a breakdown, there is a crisis of faith at the same time. (service provider)

4. The needs of street youth/youth at risk are diverse and are related to differences in their present circumstances and their past histories.

Some needs are common to youth with similar backgrounds and experiences. Other needs of street youth are diverse, reflecting the diversity within the overall category of *street youth*. This diversity is related to factors such as:

- their cultural background (for example, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal)
- how long they have been on the streets
- what educational level they achieved prior to adopting a street lifestyle.

For youth, cultural background affected daily life experiences as all Aboriginal youth interviewed in the Regina study had encountered some level of racism in their environment. In contrast, for example, non-Aboriginal youth were less likely to be told to "move on" by security guards at malls than Aboriginal youth.

Educators reported a range of issues that require attention and/or special programs. These issues include at-risk behaviours, chronic absenteeism, unstable family circumstances, alcohol- and drug-related problems, and chronic academic failure. A service provider working in an educational context felt that working with parents to get children to school was essential. The participant gave the example of a kindergarten child who had attended school for about 10 days out of the entire school year.

By the time that kindergarten kid gets to Grade 1, it has already been embedded in him that school is not important.

An educator spoke of students who have attended

15 schools before they come to Grade 9, being 17- or 18-years-old and still without a Grade 9, and having tried parts of Grade 9 four or five times and never getting through the whole way.

Related literature. Brannigan and Caputo (1994) refer to the diversity of street youth and point out that

Young people do not fit easily into the mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories needed to meet methodological requirements and facilitate research. Some are runaways, on the street for only a few hours or a few days. Others have been thrown out of their houses. Some have homes to return to but choose to spend most of their time on the street. Then there are the entrenched street youth who sleep in abandoned buildings or cars, under bridges, or who live in other marginal circumstances. (p. 13)

5. Common characteristics that describe the majority of street youth in Regina can be identified.

Most of the street youth/reclaimed youth and dialogue group participants described characteristics about themselves and/or their peers in the following ways.

- All youth/reclaimed youth interviewed are (were) involved with drugs and alcohol. Reclaimed youth reported they began experimenting with drugs and alcohol at about 13 years of age. Individual youth interviews revealed that today's street youth begin using, experimenting with, or are introduced to drugs and alcohol between 8 to 13 years of age. Sources for the drugs are usually older youth, parents of the youth's friends, and sometimes parents of the youth.
- Most of the youth, reclaimed youth, and dialogue participants had experienced numerous foster care placements.
- Youth who were not in school at the time of the interview had dropped out by approximately Grade 8.
- Many of the youth interviewed had been involved in criminal activity.
- Street youth in Regina are into *slamming*, a term used to describe intravenous drug use. The prescription drugs frequently used are Talwin and Ritalin ("Ts & Rs" in street lingo).
- All youth/reclaimed youth interviewed had run from or experienced disruption in home life.
- Many of the youth's peer groups or people *they hung out with* were usually 3 to 10 years older than the youth.
- Many of these youth have run away from circumstances at home which involved one or more forms of abuse.
- Aboriginal youth have experienced racism, especially in schools, and from both teachers and other students.
- Interactions with Social Services were described as predominately negative, with all youth having experiences with more than one social worker.

6. Female street youth face different challenges and have different needs than male street youth.

While most of the common characteristics of Regina street youth cut across gender, others can be differentiated according to whether the street youth is male or female. Although some service providers acknowledged the existence of male prostitution involving youth, the majority of youth prostitution or *sexual exploitation* involves females. Youthful prostitution brings with it a whole array of risk factors and needs.

Several youth told the youth researcher that some female youth trade sex for food or a place to stay for a few nights. This becomes a routine that involves making the rounds of known *players* in an attempt to stay off the street. However, severe drug addiction problems and the need for regular *fixes* make them particularly vulnerable to *players and pimps*, usually forcing the youth to return to the street to support their drug habit.

[I lived] mostly with my older friends. They all had their own apartments. And a lot of times it was guys that I would go and stay with, because it was just easier. You know, there was sex involved and stuff like that. And I was just really vulnerable. I never really had anyone actually tell me what sex was about . . . There was also times when I was growing up that I was abused and just mistreated, so I just had really weird ideas what sex was for and I really thought it was for men, you know? (reclaimed youth)

This trick ripped me off. He took me out of town and made me walk back. He told me he wasn't going to give me my money and he didn't. It was wintertime and [I had to] walk all the way back to Regina. I was scared because it was night time and that never, ever happened to me [before]. I was just crying. (16-year-old Aboriginal female)

Low self-esteem is a major area of concern as is female vulnerability to exploitation. Past experiences in the home and community environment are a particular challenge for female youth.

It's past experience. The initiative isn't there [to change]. It's a cycle of abuse. You can see it in 13-year-old boys. They have this control over their little 12-year-old girlfriend. I have heard stories of a 14-year-old girl putting her little sister that was 8 out on the street. And it stemmed from her being abused and this was acceptable for her because she was taught this. (service provider)

I: How did you feel after your first time [trick]?

I didn't feel very good and I just got drunk because I didn't want to think about it. (female youth)

My stepdad . . . used to live with her [mom] and he used to call me and my brother down . . . all the time, and say, "Oh, you guys are little whores." And I was only 10

and he would call me a little slut and say I'm f... people. And I haven't even experienced that yet. I used to get sick of it. (female youth)

A female youth *working the streets* offered this advice to other youth.

I would tell them not to do it, because it's nothing to feel good about. Like it just makes you feel ugly about yourself and made me feel really ugly. I don't really like myself, like my body, and my face.

I: Do you have any positive role models in your life?

I used to [look up to] my mom, but . . . I turned out like her, a big alcoholic, you know?

7. Antecedent conditions can be identified that make it more likely that youth will adopt a dangerous or damaging lifestyle. These conditions are interrelated and include:

- personal factors
- family circumstances
- school experiences.

Personal factors may include self-image and loss of a sense of identity, mental/physical health, and sexual orientation.

A 12-year-old youth who has been diagnosed as ADHD said

I [have] live [ed] with my grandma, all my life . . . 'cause when I was born my mom used to do lots of drugs when she was carrying me and stuff.

Family circumstances reveal patterns of family disruption including separation/divorce, absent fathers, violence and abuse, extreme poverty, and inadequate housing. Every youth, reclaimed youth, and dialogue participant interviewed cited disruption in home life and family circumstances as the reason they left or were removed from the home.

I think that a lot of it is probably about role models - not having very many. I just had my mother who was struggling, right? So I think that, for obstacles, it would be not having information provided to them. In a way I hate to say it, but it is education, not education like school. It's education like 'what it's like out there' and 'what it can be like if you do something different.' . . . It's about making smart choices. (reclaimed youth)

School experiences that affect youth include lack of social acceptance by peers, teachers, and adult school personnel; chronic academic failure; and extensive movement between and among various schools.

They [teachers] would just concentrate on other kids and they wouldn't [help me individually], they just teach [the lesson] one time and you have to learn that one

time. (youth, now in an alternative-school setting, talking about the regular school setting)

We have students [who] by Grade 7 and 8 have been in 14 schools. (service provider)

Understanding these antecedent conditions is critical for developing preventative measures.

8. **Agreement exists among service providers that street youth/youth at risk need accessible services.** Accessibility is described in terms of (a) the physical location and (b) the emotional climate of the programs/institutions offering the service. For street youth, accessibility relates to the lack of financial resources for most, to their emotional vulnerability, and to their lack of trust of persons in authority.

Lack of financial resources. Many youth and service providers emphasized the difficulty that youth have in accessing education, health, and/or counselling services because of a lack of money for transportation and/or childcare. The following comments from survey respondents indicate the nature of these needs.

[We need provision for] student transportation to and from our program.

Accessible childcare at cost or free.

Bridging for kids [who are] not ready to do academics but still requiring programming to hook them in.

Safe ways to connect with services and supports. A need of street youth/youth at risk explicitly discussed, and implicit in current literature, is the need for safe ways to connect with services and supportive persons. This need is the result of the past experiences of many youth, especially those of Aboriginal ancestry, and relates to their fear of loss of autonomy.

A lot of the youth we deal with, a lot of our street youth, they have no reason to trust adults. They have no reason to trust the system, just because of their . . . family backgrounds, issues, et cetera. (service provider)

I went to Social Services and reported it [sexual abuse by my stepdad] when I was 15 and said I couldn't live there any more. What they did at the time was say "Okay, well, we're going to have to confirm your story with him." And, of course, they went up and asked him and he was a really good talker back then and, so, he made me look like a liar. I never went back to any social workers after that; I never went to the place. Instead, I started getting in trouble with the law, just to be put away. (youth)

But I, I was so scared of getting caught and thrown back into Dojack that I hid from anyone that had anything to do with being clean or whatever. I was just really

scared and I just turned tricks in the back alleys – pretty much anywhere I could quickly just jump away. There was a few social workers that tried really, really hard to reach out to me. I mean really, really hard. (reclaimed youth)

Government is not always viewed positively by folks at risk – suspicions about motives can impede the trust necessary for effective service. (survey respondent)

Related literature.

One of the difficult things for the public to grasp is that a very sizeable number of those young persons who are part of the street culture are already runaways from child-welfare institutions. In other words, from the perspectives of many street people, social agencies are part of their problem and not always part of their solutions. (Brannigan & Caputo, 1992, p. 28)

9. Extensive evidence supports the view that the choice of a street lifestyle is most often made on the basis of its being seen as the most desirable option among a range of undesirable alternatives. The Regina interviews yielded little evidence to support the view that the choice of a street lifestyle was simply arbitrary or unrelated to challenges the youth were facing. This appeared to be true, regardless of the socioeconomic group from which the youth had come.

The perception held by many of the general public that some street youth choose this lifestyle solely to gain greater freedom from adult supervision and rules was not substantiated by youth interviewed in this project. Resistance to comply with the "house rules" was sometimes a contributing factor, but more often seemed to act as an excuse to *run*. An 18-year-old, non-Aboriginal youth explains his decision to leave home at 14.

One problem after another would come up and I would just try to put it under the rug . . . before another one came up. [I would] deal with my stepfather one day and then my mom the next day. I don't know, basically I was pushed out of the house and I just wanted to find some place to go where I was wanted. Through the whole process I have never showed them disrespect. If I felt I was going to, I would just walk away and I wouldn't go back.

The reason for *running* or being taken from their homes, most often cited by youth and reclaimed youth, was domestic violence. A 16-year-old Aboriginal female recalls her experience.

We got taken away because my mom got beat up and I seen her get beat up in front of me. . . . There was a whole bunch of blood on the floor and I was like, "Oh my God!" I thought she got murdered . . . I was just a little kid and my sister's trying to push me downstairs and telling me, "Oh, you shouldn't see Mom like this." . . . Then I went running to her - me and my mom used to be very close – I went running to her and I was on top of her and I was crying to her. Somebody phoned the cops, and the

cops came, and Social Services, and they took us [her and a younger brother] away from my mom.

A 16-year-old Aboriginal male explained why he ran away from home at the age of 12.

I always had to watch the kids when she would drink and stuff. Then when she slowed down drinking, she would tell me to come home. And I would go home, but I would still babysit and stuff, and I got tired of doing everything at home.

- 10. A major part of what has been lacking in the lives of street youth is the fundamental need to feel valued and respected as a person. Youth and service providers talked about this need as having two aspects. Namely, (a) having someone in their life who cares about them, and (b) being viewed positively by their family, community, and society.**

Service providers and youth alike spoke of the need for youth to be valued and respected as people.

Someone who cares about them. A 14-year-old Aboriginal female offered this explanation of why youth run away from home.

Some of them just think that they're having it so hard at home They think that they deserve better, or something, and they don't like the way they are being treated, so they run away.

Several service providers expressed similar thoughts about the need for caring adults in the lives of youth.

Well, I always think their biggest need is love and acceptance, you know? . . . So, they haven't felt . . . accepted at school and they haven't been accepted at home. That's the large majority of them. (service provider)

Probably someone who just cares about them. [For] most of them, their parents have kind of given up on them or just don't care, can't supervise them for whatever reasons and they can get lost. (service provider)

Positive view of youth. A dialogue group of reclaimed youth working as peer helpers and tutors voiced very strong objections to the way youth are spoken about and treated in society. Their concerns were related to how society negatively views youth in general, neither seeking or valuing their perspectives nor supporting their participation in community development.

More often we hear that [adults] are starting to listen to youth [and] sometimes we kind of believe that it's all for the wrong reasons . . . If [adults] all just sat down, for a change, just listened to what we have to say, maybe take it seriously instead of

patronizing us and say[ing], "Oh, that's great, that's a great idea" and go[ing] no where with it. (reclaimed youth)

11. Youth and service providers describe street youth peers as both fulfilling their need to belong and as contributing to their damaging and destructive lifestyle.

A service provider described how youth will seek association with a group in one form or another.

[They have] the same needs as any teenager. They want to belong. They want acceptance and they can't get it where they were . . . they'll find that through their association with friends [on the street].

Many street youth interviewed in the Regina study cited their friends as their only source of support. Their responses often implied they sought an environment where they would not be judged for their lifestyle. The following comments show the roles "street" peers play in their lives. Their comments are responses to the question, "What do you have in common with your friends?"

We all drink, we all do drugs, we all steal. (15-year-old male)

I just drink with them, I get high with them, and I steal cars with them once in a while. (14-year-old female)

Drugs and stuff, just hoot up weed and oil and smoke up. (12-year-old youth who started using drugs at 9)

My experience of living on the streets and living with . . . that kind of crowd, you all do drugs, right? And that's kind of one of the common bonds. (reclaimed youth)

A 16-year-old female, whose friends were 5 to 9 years older than she, said *we'd get high and guys would come over and talk and laugh around, and get drunk and stuff like that.* When asked what she had in common with her friends, she answered by saying, *We all like having fun.* However, with a moment's reflection she continued:

Actually, I don't really have anything in common with them, because one of them has a kid and one of them, Jane, is a murderer, and Judy's a dropout.

12. Street youth/youth at risk discuss cultural needs in relation to their need for a positive cultural identity.

Youth placed a great deal of emphasis on the need for programs that are socially and culturally relevant. This includes the visibility of Aboriginal people in roles of leadership and authority.

Loss of cultural knowledge creates a spiritual void. Aboriginal youth spoke of the need to reconnect with *their culture*. One youth expressed the need for a return of spirituality because *a lot of people really don't care about that any more*.

[Our youth] are really losing themselves. They are not guided properly. There's a lot of distractions and stuff that force them to go other ways, or they choose to go other ways. We have our own ancestry, we have our own heritage and our own belonging, our own identity. I just think that's really lost for some people. (Aboriginal youth)

The way I grew up wasn't around the Native spirituality . . . being from a dysfunctional family, nobody practiced their ancestry traditions and today I'm still learning about it. I feel ashamed sometimes because I can't talk my language. When I was up North this summer, people were talking to me in Cree and I was like, "I don't understand you." (reclaimed youth)

I know everything there is to know about Jesus and God but I couldn't tell you the first thing about Native spirituality. (Aboriginal female youth)

Education and cultural identity. The students in a dialogue group discussion stressed the importance of providing a variety of culturally related activities at school. A youth in the group explained, *We went to see a couple of Native people who just produced a film*. The youth described the filmmaker's explanation of his journey. The filmmaker said

I didn't know myself and I was lost, and I went back and found out . . . [about] my grandfathers and my forefathers. It helped give me a sense of who I was and my own identity, so now I can go into the future instead of not really knowing what's happening.

The student concluded by saying, *I think that's a big element that needs to be recognized by a lot of people, 'cause it is a part of people, and if you ignore it, it's not a good thing.*

Several youth spoke about the need to be in an environment where you felt accepted.

I like the fact that it's a more Aboriginal school. You see a lot of artwork and stuff that's Native, and we have a lot of speakers who are Native who come here. It's just a little more inspirational. (male youth dialogue participant)

I like it when they have Native speakers come here, people who have actually gone past the stages of just being an alcoholic and an Indian on the reserve. Where they can actually feel the freedom of being able to travel and have money and be accepted as people, as opposed to [the image of] just being an Indian on a reserve. We had a storyteller, a guy who writes books, come in here a little while ago and he was just really right on. (Aboriginal youth)

Many Aboriginal youth described their lack of important cultural knowledge. For example, one youth said

Nobody ever taught me that 'cause I got brought up by white people and most of the Elders in my family are dead. (Aboriginal youth)

OBJECTIVE 3: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS RELATED TO EFFECTIVE AND COORDINATED SERVICE PROVISION

- 1. Inadequate funding for service provision results in a lack of resources to provide adequate services to street youth/youth at risk. The lack of appropriate, sufficient resources is considered to have serious implications for street youth/youth at risk, for personnel and for programs.**

Implications for youth. In some cases, insufficient resources are described as causing further disruptions in the lives of youth and further putting them at risk. Specifically, for youth this means:

- no "safeplaces"⁴
- lack of accessible counselling services
- lack of alternative school programming/placements
- no drug-and-alcohol treatment programs/facilities specifically designed for their age group and needs
- long wait time for help, especially in times of crisis
- lack of appropriate assessments and assessment personnel
- lack of sufficient cultural awareness/sensitivity for Aboriginal youth in large schools and other institutional settings
- an overall lack of stable and consistent service provision
- fewer opportunities for trusting relationships to develop between youth and service providers.

Implications for front-line service providers. The difficulties and strains caused by this serious lack of resources results in an atmosphere where service providers feel overwhelmed. Service providers become frustrated and discouraged with their inability to provide adequate services to youth. The result is:

- high levels of stress
- burn-out and high personnel turnover rate
- crisis-oriented responses
- feelings of being undervalued which may lead to lower self-esteem and resentment because of lack of recognition
- lack of time and energy to form bonds with colleagues or to offer mutual support.

Implications for programs. Inadequate funding places increased pressures on government departments and nongovernment agencies and becomes a divisive force in the human-

⁴ Safeplaces sanctioned by the community for youth to use in emergency situations on a short-term basis.

services sector. Programs suffer from lack of stability, consistency, and continuity. The following elements characterize these program challenges:

- competitive atmosphere
- hostility and suspicion between and among NGO community
- competition for resources (especially placements) between government departments
- hostility and suspicion between government and nongovernment sectors
- understaffing
- inadequate preparation and training for service providers
- short-term project programming
- programs that are narrow or shortsighted in focus
- crisis-model service provision, especially for government programs and contracted services.

Table 2 presents the factors that survey respondents felt were an impediment to adequate service provision.

2. **There is evidence that caring and concerned service provision exists in all institutions and programs. However, service providers' ability to show consistent care and concern is also "at risk."**

This is due to:

- inadequate funding
- the distrust that youth display
- lack of long-term supports that are necessary to change damaging and dangerous behaviour/thought patterns.

As indicated in the previous finding, inadequate funding affects all aspects of service provision because it results in a serious lack of resources. Eventually, service providers become frustrated and discouraged at seeing:

High numbers, looking at the horrendous personal and social issues, family issues of the youth that we deal with and being somewhat helpless in terms of making an impact on that. (government service provider)

Youth's distrust of persons in positions of authority, combined with many of their behaviour patterns, is a challenge and barrier that service providers face on a regular basis. This distrust is deeply rooted in the Aboriginal population because generations of families have suffered at the hands of government intervention, policies, and procedures. As well, almost all government service providers are of non-Aboriginal ancestry.

Table 2

Factors that Survey Respondents felt Hindered or Blocked Service Provision (N = 37)

Factors	n^a
Financial restrictions	26
Insufficient personnel	17
Nature/needs of youth ^b	16
Policies of provincial government agencies ^c	15
Increasing stress of service providers	15
Paperwork	11
Complicated approval system	9
Inadequately trained personnel	8
Location of office	7
Policies of municipal government agencies	5
Limited cultural awareness	3
Policies of my organization	0

Note. 30 of 37 agencies responded to this item. The overarching issue is funding (e.g., insufficient personnel, inadequately trained personnel, etc.).

^anumber of responses.

^bYouth distrust of authority/institutions, as well as the multiple and complex needs of youth.

^cRestricted nature of legal definitions/categorizations of youth, limited flexibility of policies, and policies and procedures related to funding (see pp. 38, 39 for discussion).

Service providers become particularly discouraged, personally and professionally, by the overall instability caused by short-term programming for youth at risk. Many programs do not have sufficient personnel or funding to offer any significant long-term support for youth and, as a result, many youth who have benefited from short-term treatment revert back to dangerous and damaging behaviours.

Do we send a child to get their Grade 7 in 6 weeks? It's a process . . . a lot of programs are short term and, "yes," they're excellent programs and they are really effective, but that's not where the learning takes place It needs to be reinforced again and carried on. (service provider)

3. **There is support for integrative and collaborative approaches to service provision; however, in practice, there are serious challenges to their implementation. These challenges are related, but not restricted, to insufficient funding.**

Factors, other than funding, that contribute to the challenge of integrating services include the adversarial nature of relationships within the human-services sector, as well as the issues/problems that arise as a result of the values/attitudes of the dominant society. The following factors characterize the human-service industry and become major barriers to integration of services.

- (a) Government/Nongovernment relationships:
- perceptions of imbalance of power relationships between government departments
 - territorial disputes/conflicts between nongovernment agencies
 - lack of clarity regarding roles/responsibilities between government and nongovernment agencies.
- (b) Present nature of the broader societal context:
- dominant materialistic values and an atmosphere of competition in relation to jobs, goods, and services
 - public perception of Social Services and government institutions as being responsible for addressing the problem, but little awareness of how problems are solved
 - the poor are blamed for the rising cost of social programs/increased taxes
 - disputes between and among agencies/departments about ownership of problem (e.g., prostitution/sexual exploitation).

Table 3 indicates the average number of interactions that a single agency has with other agencies/organizations.

Table 3

Average Number of Agencies with which each Type of Organization Cooperates (N = 37)

Agency	<i>n</i> ^a
Government	16
Nongovernment	10
Other (religious organizations, education)	13
Overall Average	13

Note. 37 of 37 agencies responded.

^anumber of organizations with which the agency cooperates.

Table 4 identifies the nature of cooperation between and among agencies.

4. For funding purposes and to provide adequate service provision, service programs/providers face significant dilemmas in defining street youth/youth at risk: they must meet the needs of youth and, at the same time, be accountable to the community.

The dilemmas around definition have implications for youth and service providers concerning responsibilities and revolve around the following areas:

- childhood/adulthood
- family/not a family
- friend/not a friend.

Dilemmas for service providers related to definitional issues include:

- When and to what extent should children/youth have a say in where they live and with whom? For example, youth have experienced neglect and various forms of abuse in their homes and family situations but run from foster-care placements. Example: Youth is not considered old enough to be responsible for self but has been looking after self and babysitting siblings from a young age.

Table 4

Ways in Which Agencies/Organizations Cooperate (N = 37)

Nature of Cooperation	n ^a
Referrals	34
Communicate, talk, plan, share experiences & information	28
Liaison with other professionals for "hands-on" services	19
Share space	14
Pool resources/resource sharing	13
Shared fund raising	8
Shared administrative services	4
Other (assessment, counselling, training & information, transportation, program delivery, access to all services in the community)	1

Note. 36 of 37 agencies responded.

^aThe number of times this method of cooperation was mentioned.

- To what extent should school and classroom groupings and courses reflect the reality of the life experiences of many children and youth? For example, within schools children are grouped by chronological age and curricula is focused on content considered appropriate to that age group. Yet, some children have had *adult* experiences considered to be harmful and unsuitable for children.
- When and to what extent should children/youth have a voice in decisions related to their health? For example, a single-parent mother under 16 needs parental permission for an operation, yet is considered responsible for health of her own child. Example: Youth refuses treatment for a health-threatening addiction, yet government agencies can intervene in the health and welfare of children and youth.

Dilemmas for youth include:

- Choices for living situations are often from among a range of unfavourable alternatives. For example, no support and stability is provided at home and yet foster placements are not permanent/stable and often do not contribute to a positive sense of identity for youth.
- Within the youth's school experience, there are few choices in relation to peer group or what the curricula will focus on, yet schools may offer the only experience of stability and safety in the child/youth's life.

- Patterns of addictions, malnourishment, and neglect were most often established at a young age, yet supports for children and families were not available on a level where early intervention might have resulted in prevention.
- Children and youth have experienced government intervention imposed on them against their wishes and with no alternatives. A pattern of "having no voice" in their own affairs in relation to dominant institutions creates youth who are distrustful and lacking in strong decision-making abilities.
- Family life and friendships as portrayed by the media and school curricula are at odds with the experiences of many children and street youth. (While youth are able to recognize that they have not been "cared for" by their families and that they are often "used and abused" by their friends, the need for a family and a social group does not go away.)

Across cultures, the traditional sources of strong positive identity come from:

- love and care of parents and family members
- successes and recognition at school and/or creative, recreation/sports activities
- positive experiences and acceptance from peer group
- a personal and positive sense of one's own historical roots.

Yet street youth may have experienced few or none of these, while still being expected by the public/institutions to exhibit positive behaviours.

Street youth/youth at risk and service providers daily face these respective dilemmas and challenges, whereas there is little public awareness of their magnitude and of the implications for the community/society.

Dilemmas for service providers related to policy setting and economic realities include:

- harm reduction measures such as needle exchanges may give the impression that the addiction is being condoned and supported
- long-term social, emotional and personal supports for "*sex trade workers*" may be done with the hope that this will give them a belief in themselves necessary for getting them off the streets but could appear to be supporting their present circumstances and life choices
- situations where service provider is aware that the youth's home situation is unsafe while at the same time, youth resists placement into foster care or alternative setting.

The fundamental dilemma for service providers is, "how much autonomy can they grant to the youth while remaining accountable to public policy and legal requirements?" Such dilemmas also center on questions of, "What's the best immediate action given present fiscal realities and how far we are from long-term solutions? how do we decide whose most deserving in times when funds are not adequate to meet all needs in a full and long-term manner?"

5. Service providers identified the building of a quality relationship between themselves and youth as a key element in meeting the needs of street youth/youth at risk.

I think that success in benefiting youth on the street begins with a relationship being developed with the youth. Often, it seems agencies offer amenities but no real [human] substance to the relationship.

Service providers discussed some positive aspects of working with street youth/youth at risk and all situations revealed that the worker had established a strong relationship with youth. Participants identified specific personal qualities and the background of personnel as significant indicators of the ability to successfully work with street youth/youth at risk.

Service providers deemed the following personal qualities as essential to establishing positive, trusting relationships with street youth/youth at risk.

- *relaxed and nonjudgmental worker style*
- *respect for youth, their strength, wisdom, experience*
- *willingness to build a mutually respectful/trusting relationship*
- *wise, knowledgeable, culturally relevant personnel*
- *community leadership [from] people who have street experience but are well into recovery*
- *focus on needs of youth, not needs of the system*
- *staff truly recognizing that the only one who can identify need is youth, not an assuming professional.*

6. Establishing a positive relationship with youth/families rewards service providers with moments of personal satisfaction and feelings of success.

Big smiles, happy faces . . . seeing them be kids. Because sometimes they are way, way too old for 13- and 14-year-olds.

Seeing youth and their families work through their problems and gain success.

I love working with the youth . . . there is something resilient and energizing about youth . . . somehow, in the whole scheme of things, to still have hope for youth that they can and do make changes. [To know that I] perhaps have a [positive] impact on their life.

7. Service providers identified specific program approaches as necessary to building positive relationships with youth.

Service providers identified the following characteristics as necessary elements of successful programming:

- *programs have a clear purpose that relates to the needs of the people it serves*
- *continuity of staff and resources*
- *projects are aware that group members will come and go and that turnover among youth will be high*
- *open-door policy – recognizing that youth/adults may need one, three, ten tries*

- *a creative approach to needs identification as opposed to a standard form designed by nonstreet persons*
- *programs that attempt to also deal with family and community in a holistic way (programs that include and support youth, family, community)*
- *accessibility – outreach program which meets the kids on their turf*
- *holistic – spiritual, social/emotional, intellectual, physical*
- *that youth be a part of all components [of program design] and that development of [the] project be at the pace of youth.*

8. Cross-cultural sensitivity/awareness was recognized as important; however, there is disagreement as to how this should be approached.

The concept of cultural relevance or cultural sensitivity was cited by many service providers as a necessary element in developing a bridge between cultures and, most specifically, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. However, there appears to be considerable disagreement as to what constitutes culturally appropriate programming.

Some service providers view cultural awareness as simply a package of material/information made available to youth; others view it as a process, one that develops very slowly over time. One respondent felt that service providers/programs should make no distinctions between or among cultures and that continuing to single out Aboriginal youth as being different or receiving special considerations becomes another form of marginalization with negative connotations for Aboriginal youth. Still other participants felt that all service providers should be mandated to take cross-cultural/multicultural awareness workshops.

Examples of the range of concerns and program responses in this area include the following.

- (a) **Aboriginal presence in institutions/positions of authority.** There was a call from several respondents for increased Aboriginal presence in government services, especially Social Services, as well as in schools. Aboriginal respondents also expressed the need to place and increase the number of people of Aboriginal ancestry in to positions of authority.
- (b) **Aboriginal leadership training for youth.** One service provider has developed a leadership model (available to youth of all cultures) that is process oriented and develops slowly over time. Youth are introduced and led to investigate their culture by pursuing answers to the following three questions:
 - Who am I as an individual?
 - Where did I come from (heritage/ancestry)?
 - Where am I going?

To gain a better understanding of their ancestral past and to establish a stronger sense of identity, students begin by researching their family tree.

She feels that gaining knowledge of culture and developing skills is a slow process and an integral part of building self-esteem in the youth. She also stressed that this approach does not preach or coerce youth to embrace traditional ways.

I just like them to know it's here. We use the Medicine Wheel a lot in our workshops, so they are slowly learning about tradition and culture, yet it's not something that's brought to them all at once [that] they are expected to know.
(service provider)

In this model, throughout their investigations, students are encouraged to compare cultures and to look for similarities rather than differences, to seek a balance between past and present. Many outside resource people are invited to *tell their stories or their history*.

- (c) **Cultural differences and conflicts.** Another significant aspect of cultural sensitivity identified in service provision was understanding and respecting alternate ways of parenting. Conflicts are perceived to arise between "white" family traditions of raising children and "First Nations Traditional" ways of raising children.

What Social Services wants to teach them is the 1, 2, 3, magic kind of thing - time outs, talking with your children. And that brings in a cultural conflict in the way these people were taught by their Elders to raise their children. (NGO service provider)

- (d) **Literature related to cultural relevance.** The literature identifies two areas of significant difference between traditional Aboriginal and Euro-Western cultural beliefs regarding the raising of children: community parenting and the notion of noninterference.

Brendtro et al. (1990) state that parenting was not just left to the biological parents because "children were nurtured within a larger circle of significant others . . . the child experienced a network of caring adults" (p. 37). In contrast, Euro-Western parenting practices and beliefs are more inclined to expect the parent to bear the sole responsibility of child rearing.

The concept of noninterference applies to both child/adult and adult/adult human relationships within the traditional Aboriginal culture. Hart (cited in O'Meara & West, 1996) suggests that "if interference occurs, then it is within a different perspective, namely through indirect means" and that if a friend wishes to express an opposing belief/opinion she "tells me a personal story that reflects her opinion" (p. 62).

Morrisette, McKenzie, and Morrisette (cited in O'Meara & West, 1996) acknowledge that personal cultural identities have been influenced by the dominant societal attitudes/values and affected by "the historical erosion of traditional cultural practices" (p. 71). They suggest that Aboriginal people may fall along a continuum wherein "expressions of culture may be non-traditional, neo-traditional, or traditional" (p. 71).

They emphasize, however, the importance for "service providers to be conscious of this assimilation process and be able to offer service modalities which match the needs of people being served" (p. 71).

Finally, Brendtro et al. (1990) point out that overriding all cultural concerns is the necessity to foster self-esteem because "without a sense of self-worth, a young person from any cultural or family background is vulnerable to a host of social, psychological and learning problems" (p. 35).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data analysis of the information collected from a broad range of agencies/individuals representing the human-services sector in Regina, the following conclusions are presented. The conclusions also respond to common experiences described by street youth.

1. All youth are potentially at risk in a socially toxic environment. However, for some youth the lack of opportunities and an accumulation of risk factors (see pp. 15, 16) make them particularly vulnerable to dangerous and damaging lifestyles. Large numbers of children and youth from Regina's First Nations and Métis communities fall into this category of vulnerability.
2. Present societal values prohibit the implementation of the structural changes required to provide adequate supports to youth/families at risk. The continued emphasis of a socioeconomic structure built on the concept of consumption contributes to devaluing and marginalizing individuals who are not perceived as contributing to the monetarized economy (see discussion on pp. 14, 15).
3. For youth who adopt a street lifestyle, services are most valuable when the youth ask for help. At this point, both short- and long-term supports are needed at a level not currently available. A common barrier to adequate service provision centres on the issue of accessibility of services for youth. Factors that impinge on limited accessibility include:
 - financial (e.g., transportation)
 - need for services to be available when youth are on the street (e.g., after 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.)
 - lack of information about services available
 - waiting lists for services (e.g., counselling)
 - time lag between request, referral, and service provision
 - youth's lack of awareness of services available
 - youth's distrust of institutional service provision
 - youth's distrust of persons in authority.
4. It appears to be more challenging (less successful) to help "damaged" youth *turn their lives around*, than to provide preventative measures for children. Preventative programming focused on families, infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and young children is less costly in the

long term, than incarcerating and/or "rehabilitating" youth who become addicts and offenders. (*Working Together to Address Barriers to Learning*, 1994, p. 10).

5. Schools are key sites where preventative measures are possible. Schools have regular, sustained contact with children of families at risk from a young age. They also have a relatively broad mandate in terms of developing the full range of abilities necessary for physical survival and the creation of a meaningful life.
6. Present funding is inadequate for purposes of prevention. The greatest needs in terms of prevention appear to be:
 - increased resources for "in-home" family support workers and services to help develop family capabilities and keep families together
 - decreased pupil/teacher ratio and an increased number of adults (trained volunteers and paraprofessionals) to provide key educational programming and personal support to vulnerable children and youth (e.g., early literacy intervention programs that link children with supportive, caring adults)
 - authentic, adequate integrated services in every low-income community (provided in one central building complex).
7. Integrated services cannot be imposed or developed during times of fiscal restraint. It is an unfair and unworkable government expectation to promote integrated services without funding to support it. Nongovernment agencies, particularly, are adversely affected by the climate created. Agencies become protective and territorial concerning their niche of service provision (e.g., youth prostitution) which, in turn, creates an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion. As agencies compete for limited funds, funding policies that mandate "partnering" are sometimes abused.

To ensure that programs and projects have been carried out as described, agencies call for some form of inspection or follow-up procedures regarding the reports submitted.

Nongovernment agencies are often unable to find, hire, or retain qualified personnel to implement the programs developed. One of the main reasons cited by NGOs is the inability to offer adequate wages, benefits, and overall job security. There also appears to be a strong need for programs that prepare and train potential service providers.

8. The type of integration that appears to be most needed is not at the level of smaller nongovernment programs banding together. Rather, it is the major government institutions, who are responsible for the welfare of children and youth at risk, that must provide integrated service provision. This includes integration of policies, procedures, and training.
9. The qualities of good programs for youth/youth at risk are consistently described by service providers across programs and institutions and by the literature reviewed. The qualities most frequently cited and considered most important are:
 - Service providers have an understanding of and a commitment to the community they serve.

- Service providers are appropriately and adequately educated/trained in the key areas related to their responsibilities within the programs.
 - Programs are flexible in design and delivery when applying policies/procedures to better meet the changing, diverse needs of youth at risk.
 - All persons involved in the delivery or reception of services within a program are represented in the planning process.
 - Policy and supports are in place for local autonomy in decision making related to crucial areas which is necessary for flexible service provision.
 - The approach to youth is respectful, nonjudgmental, warm, and nonthreatening.
 - Youth are valued for their particular insights and abilities and are respected as human beings.
 - Youth are given opportunities for meaningful involvement in program development and are provided opportunities to contribute to the community.
 - Service provision reflects an understanding of (a) the needs of street youth/youth at risk for a positive identity and (b) the processes related to cultural sensitivity and responsiveness.
 - All persons involved in program delivery and program successes are given significant and sufficient recognition.
10. Street youth/youth at risk do not fit into the dominant societal definitions and norms that distinguish children from adults. Typically, their basic human needs are not met in ways that society would expect. On the one hand, their situation would classify them as "children;" on the other, many of their experiences and responsibilities are considered to be in the adult domain. This situation, together with their often dangerous and damaging life circumstances and choices, creates serious dilemmas for service providers and administrators. At present, many contradictions and conflicts center on our inability as a society to come to terms with the circumstances of youth at risk which are neither those of a child nor those of an adult.
 11. To develop policies that better meet the needs of street youth/youth at risk, process oriented, as opposed to legal, definitions of adult status need to be developed, with input from all relevant community groups, including youth.
 12. Service providers cite successes with youth as the main reward of their work but describe it as happening too infrequently.
 13. Many people at all levels of human services care about youth and cooperate with other agencies when and where they can. Failure to meet the needs of street youth does not appear to be a problem of indifference or prejudice on the part of service providers, although many youth feel that. Rather, the problem appears to be more related to an inability to meet youth needs with inadequate funding.
 14. When asked about the rewards of their work, no service provider mentioned collegiality/team work in their work environment. They did not discuss any positive aspects of their immediate work environments, but developed a portrait of their work life as involving high levels of frustration and feelings of isolation. This is a significant area for consideration if integration/cooperation is to become a sustainable reality.

15. Service providers who work with families, children, and youth at risk require monetary remuneration and personal recognition that more adequately reflects the valuable and demanding roles they play in their communities.
16. Community initiatives that propose actions of a creative or informal nature often become bogged down in bureaucratic red tape/procedural barriers, which often discourages local participation in formal programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There needs to be a true commitment to real relationship-building with youth . . . if this was a tenant of all programming, how would the world have to change? (service provider)

The following recommendations are designed to (a) better meet the needs of street youth/youth at risk and (b) provide support to front-line workers in the identified areas of need in the Regina human-services sector. These recommendations are based on the data and information collected from the Regina Hidden Youth Project. Youth/Reclaimed youth and front-line service providers, both government and nongovernment, have reviewed and provided feedback to the Hidden Youth Project Team related to these recommendations. The recommendations have been categorized into fundamental values, immediate and long-term needs and supports, although all recommendations could be considered immediate.

VALUE FOCUS NECESSARY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The magnitude of structural change required, involves a societal shift in values from materialism/individualism to a more caring, just and communally responsible society. Implicit in these recommendations is the necessity to provide **adequate funding**, with a focus on **preventative programming** measures.

The following actions are fundamental to improved service provision and should underlie all decision making related to implementing the Recommendations of this report.

- Increased resources for "in-home" family support workers and services to help develop family capabilities and keep families together
- Decreased pupil/teacher ratio in schools and an increased number of adults (trained volunteers and paraprofessionals) to provide key educational programming and personal support to vulnerable children and youth
- Provision of authentic, adequate integrated services in every low-income community (basic/core services should be available in one central building complex)
- Support for and valuing of community initiatives that propose creative solutions and informal structures.

IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND SUPPORTS

1. **Priority must be given to creating "safeplaces" and ways to increase sufficient, appropriate longer term housing placements for youth at risk. This has implications for resource allocation and policy development.**

- Safeplaces, sanctioned by the community, for youth to use in emergency/crisis situations on a short-term basis. There are complex issues related to policies/procedures concerning this recommendation; however, the need appears urgent and the entire community, including youth and parents of youth, should be involved in establishing criteria/parameters for a network of safeplaces and their use.
- Increased numbers of longer term housing placements in all areas (e.g., foster care, team and group-home facilities, transition houses) are needed to provide youth and service providers with a range of alternatives.

2. **There is an urgent need to establish long-term drug-and-alcohol healing/treatment centre/programs specifically designed for youth.**

Service providers from all human-service sectors called for immediate provision of appropriate drug-and-alcohol abuse healing/treatment centres for youth. While specific models were not cited, such programming should incorporate a continuum of long-term supports for youth and their families, when appropriate.

3. **There is an urgent need for increased space for youth in alternative-school settings/programs, with a curricular emphasis on meeting the practical, personal and cultural needs of the youth, rather than curricula based solely on the requirements for certification/diploma.**

Increasing numbers of youth require alternate approaches to mainstream classroom settings/techniques. While alternative school programs provide a valuable service to youth, there is a need for programs to review/revise curricula to offer more holistic programming for the youth. (See Recommendation 5.)

- Students require **practical** curricular activities that have strong, clear connections between their everyday lives and their school lives. This means that academic learning must be linked to real human needs.
- Students require activities and opportunities that aid in developing **interpersonal** and **intrapersonal** skills/abilities – ones that focus on self-esteem and on ways to show care and affection for others.
- Students require opportunities to become acquainted with **cultural** customs and practices (see Recommendation 16).

School systems/educators must endeavor to remove the stigma that students often feel in alternative-education programs. "Mainstream" students and society often view alternative settings as less authentic than the regular programs and therefore less valuable. This is

particularly significant for the youth in these programs who already struggle with feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem.

4. **Schools need to provide smaller school structures and create a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere within the larger school settings. School boards need to raise public awareness concerning the long-term cost effectiveness of smaller high schools.**

Youth at risk need to feel known, accepted, and valued within the school community. Recognition of this should be central to decision making that relates to their educational needs. When designing educational programs for youth and children at risk, attention needs to be paid to school size, pupil-teacher ratio, and continuity and quality of staff.

5. **Schools and other educational/developmental programs must recognize the importance of creative-aesthetic, spiritual, and recreational/physical development which strengthens a positive sense of self-worth in vulnerable youth.**

Fostering the desire to survive and creating ways for a meaningful life need to be given equal recognition, along with developing means for physical survival and self-sufficiency. Programs should be holistic in nature and incorporate the four domains of human-development: the physical, social/emotional, intellectual and spiritual.

Commitment to educating the whole child/youth requires that students have opportunities to (a) explore and develop their creative-aesthetic gifts, (b) examine and establish a sense of identity and self-worth, and (c) participate in physical-recreational activities.

Brendtro et al. (1990) offer many suggestions and outline the essential elements for creating an atmosphere of "reclaiming."

6. **There is a need for increased preemployment preparation program opportunities designed to develop the skills/abilities of youth. Programs designed to meet the unique needs, challenges, and requirements of First Nations and Métis youth are especially needed.**

Such programs could be short term and incorporated into school programs, as well as programs offered by nongovernment organizations. Many youth who feel unable to participate in formal institutional school settings may be prepared to attend alternative work-preparation programs, including those developed around the mentorship and/or work co-op model.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS THAT PROVIDE CONSISTENCY, CONTINUITY, AND STABILITY FOR YOUTH AT RISK AND FOR THE HUMAN-SERVICE SECTOR

7. **Government must lead the way for integrating services by providing a full range of basic (core) services required for youth, families, and communities at risk in the areas of family support, health, education, housing, recreation, and justice.**

This provision of core services should be implemented in an integrated manner. These basic services should be available to the youth/families within a school/community-centre complex (community-service provision centre), whenever possible.

8. **Preventative programming: Funding and decision making related to youth at risk must give priority to prevention. This means focusing on more supports for young children and their families.**

"Preventive actions are seen as enhancing quality of life and reducing long-term costs" (*Saskatchewan Human Services: Working Together*, 1996, p. 14). "Efforts to direct resources and supports to at risk students and families before major problems or symptoms become apparent, prevent later, more costly, and intrusive interventions" (*Working Together to Address Barriers to Learning: Integrated School-Linked Services for Children and Youth at Risk*, 1994, p. 10).

9. **An interagency training program should be established that is designed to support and upgrade service providers' qualifications for working with youth at risk within an integrated service model.**

This program should include appropriate training/preparation of people/organizations in the values, attitudes, and behaviours needed for providing integrated services.

10. **Community Youth Councils and leadership programs/teams need to be established under the guidance and with the support of adults, to give youth opportunities to have meaningful input/responsibilities in programs/activities.**

These programs should be aimed at developing proactive solutions to the challenges faced by youth at risk. Such programs can only be effective when supported by adults who truly believe that youth offer valuable perspectives and abilities.

11. **Nongovernment agencies must be encouraged and supported in their efforts to partner and integrate with "community service-provision centres," in order to offer a broad range of specialized program services identified by youth and communities.**
12. **Increased funding must be provided for all sectors of human service (government and nongovernment) that serve children, youth, and families at risk.**

For government, this includes:

- ensuring that fundamental mandates are filled (for example, ensuring that the needs of **all students** are met as described in the Education Act)
- emphasizing preventative-measures programming
- establishing salaries commensurate with the valuable services provided by those who work with children, youth and families at risk
- giving value to and recognition for the efforts of human-service providers and acknowledgement of the complexity and challenges of their work

- evaluating programs to ascertain and compare the percentage of resources spent that deliver benefits to youth and the percentage of resources that go to support the system.

Fundamental to participatory democracy is the concept of local autonomy. For flexible service provision, policy and supports must be in place for local autonomy in decision making that is related to crucial areas. As well, government decision makers should be included in community meetings/discussions to close the gap between plans of action and decisions necessary to implement these plans. To avoid unnecessary "naming and blaming" confrontations, all participants should take part in establishing a protocol or procedural format.

This cooperation is especially crucial in preventative-action services/programs such as teen-parenting programs, childcare, early childhood education, and in-home family support services.

- 13. Policies and procedures for nongovernment agencies must be reviewed and restructured to better support the valuable work of nongovernment agencies and solidify their relationships with the communities they serve.**

Attention must be given to the following measures.

- make better, or different, use of funds available for nongovernment programs (e.g., developing alternatives to project funding – ones that provide for longer term, more stable programming and some job security)
- help prevent/limit unnecessary competition among the NGO community
- clarify roles of government and nongovernment agencies
- establish more flexible program/project follow-up evaluative procedures – ones that better meet the diversity of service provision, while ensuring accountability of funding. One standardized evaluation form for all programs is not adequate. More emphasis must be placed on qualitative data, in addition to requiring and justifying the numbers of clients/participants served. Program qualities, such as those listed in Conclusion 9 (pp. 44, 45), should guide program evaluations.

- 14. Funding policies/procedures should be developed in consultation with all relevant agencies/communities and should encompass a long-term view of service provision.**

- 15. Programs and service providers must be sensitive to and knowledgeable about cultural characteristics and resources available in the communities they serve.**

This is an important component of education and training programs for service providers and administrators across the human-service sector – one that requires a more committed and in-depth approach.

- 16. Programs serving street youth/youth at risk need to be culturally relevant and sensitive. Cultural relevance and sensitivity should be a central element in evaluating the programs that serve youth at risk.**

If such program and evaluation measures are to go beyond the superficial treatment of culture, attention must be paid to the following principles. Culturally appropriate programming:

- (a) must be viewed and understood as a process and not as a package of material/information. The process is one that:
 - affirms the traditional culture and heritage of First Nations and Métis youth
 - creates bridges between past and present and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities through a focus on common values and unique contributions
 - is nonthreatening and has a welcoming environment – one that stresses informality but maintains protocol
 - attempts to bridge home and community social practices with the institution.
- (b) is a very slow process of development that involves exposure to and awareness of how culture, traditions, and customs influence present behaviours and values, including our own. The process incorporates respect for differing ways of viewing reality and understanding the importance of spiritual traditions.
- (c) focuses on the development of a positive cultural and personal identity. The uniqueness and value of each person is recognized and appreciated.
- (d) provides youth with information that helps them better understand themselves, their present social context, and their historical roots. This information is linked to a vision of ways that they can contribute to a better future for themselves and others and can be a life-long process.

17. Policies must be reviewed and revised to take into account process-oriented definitions of youth as opposed to defining youth solely by age in order to fulfil funding, assessment, and legal requirements and cover liability concerns.

Process-oriented definitions of youth relate the provision of adult choices and supports to the fulfilment of key responsibilities. However, the idea that an adult has the freedom to choose behaviours that are harmful to physical and emotional health is a complex area of concern in relation to youth at risk – one that requires attention in policy development and input from all relevant community members, including youth. A process-oriented definition of youth is illustrated in Figure 4.

This process establishes an atmosphere of “reclaiming” and becomes effective only when implemented in conjunction with the fundamental elements of a positive relationship.

Elements of a Positive Relationship

Caring – concern for the life and growth of the person.

Knowledge – genuine understanding of the other’s feelings.

Respect – ability to see person as s/he is and allow her/him to develop without exploitation.

Responsibility – be ready to meet the needs, expressed or unexpressed, of another human being. (Brendtro et al., 1990, p. 62)

There is an urgent need for greater public awareness of these dilemmas, as well as increased public participation (multiple voices/perspectives) in developing process-oriented definitions of *youth* and *adults*.

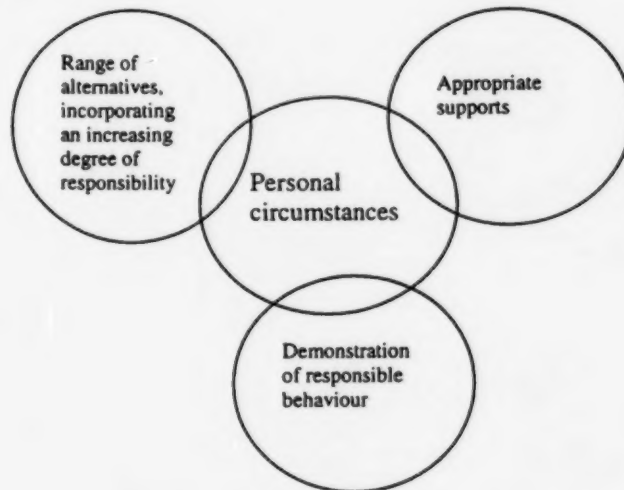


Figure 4. Process-oriented definition of youth.

18. Ways must be found to increase the supports for, and positive recognition of, service providers who work directly with youth and families at risk.

In addition to competitive salaries, key actions that need attention are reduced workloads and ways to increase collegiality and reduce isolation. Service providers must be recognized and validated by municipal/provincial governments, community members, and the larger society as making a valuable contribution to the welfare of youth.

NEXT STEPS

Where we do not feel any responsibility towards others, there is no reason for us to work harmoniously towards the common good. (Jean Vanier, Founder of L'Arche)

While it may seem somewhat unrealistic to call for an increased financial commitment to support youth/families at risk in a time of "fiscal restraint", it is even more unrealistic and perhaps irresponsible to assume the situation will improve under existing circumstances.

As stated earlier, it was difficult to establish any specific numbers of street youth/youth at risk; however, there was a general feeling among service providers that the numbers of street youth/youth at risk will increase and many youth at risk will begin a street lifestyle earlier.

It was also clear that many service providers have a clear vision of what is needed but because of limited resources, become extremely frustrated by not being able to provide the necessary supports when they are most needed. At times, service providers are simply overwhelmed by the immensity and complexity of the circumstances to which they bear witness.

In the perception of street youth, it is individuals, not systems that fail (Webber, 1991). Therefore, service providers representing the system, often bear the brunt of anger, hostility and suspicion from youth and their families. Webber notes that street youth

do not protest the existence of underfunded, understaffed, sprawling, and anonymous human-service bureaucracies in which workers – both the 'good' ones and the 'bad' ones, as street youth describe them – are saddled with impossibly large 'caseloads' and impossibly restrictive mandates. (p. 10)

The main Canadian and provincial institutions (government, business, education, church, media etc.) have central roles to play in (a) transforming the present individualistic model of social responsibility towards a more communal one and (b) developing alternatives to corporate global economic practices, policies and values.

The significance of goodwill. Having recognized that increased funding is an essential element in providing stability to the human services sector, it must also be acknowledged that significant opportunities exist for affirming and proactive actions within the community right now. Many such actions can be undertaken with existing funding given sufficient levels of goodwill within the decision-making community. This report has described some of these actions (see for example, Recommendations 11, 13, 14, and 18). As well, extensive time, effort and financial support has gone into researching and developing appropriate models for more effective service provision in the province (see *Saskatchewan Human Services: Working Together*, 1996, and *Working Together to Address Barriers to Learning: Integrated School-Linked Services for Children and Youth At Risk*, 1994).

A chart depicting the continuum of change to integrated services is provided in each of the documents mentioned above. It identifies and describes the characteristics and processes necessary for providing a more effective and efficient level of service provision. Further, the policy framework document for integrated school-linked services, establishes a strong set of "Guiding Principles and Strategies" (p. 20). All of these strategies were reiterated and echoed by participants in this project.

It would therefore appear that the single most significant element required to transform "words on paper" to "actions in the community" is an act and atmosphere of goodwill. This requires the concerted and persistent efforts of all community members, agencies and departments.

Reclaiming environments.

To reclaim is to recover and redeem, to restore value to something that has been devalued. (Brendtro et al., 1990)

Brendtro et al. (1990) describe the features that are central to establishing and creating a reclaiming environment – one that is designed to meet the needs of both youth and society.

1. Experiencing belonging in a supportive community, rather than being lost in a depersonalized bureaucracy.
2. Meeting one's needs for mastery, rather than enduring inflexible systems designed for the convenience of adults.
3. Involving youth in determining their own future, while recognizing society's need to control harmful behaviour.
4. Expecting youth to be care givers, not just helpless recipients overly dependent on the care of adults. (p. 2)

Perceiving street youth as potential contributors to society rather than as liabilities is crucial in creating the reclaiming environment.

The question to ask in the development of all policies/procedures/strategies should be, What action is most likely to make a difference at the experiential level for street youth/youth at risk?

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APPENDIX A

Survey

Service Providers: Hidden Youth Project

**SERVICE PROVIDERS: HIDDEN YOUTH PROJECT**

This survey is to collect information for purposes of analysis only. **Strict confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout data collection and reporting.**

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN BY DECEMBER 11, 1998, IN THE ENCLOSED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE.

Directions are provided throughout. *Please ✓ the appropriate ☐ or provide the relevant information.*

I. BACKGROUND

1. *Please ✓ one ☐.*

This organization represents:

- (a) government agency (provincial/municipal) ☐
(b) nongovernment agency ☐
(c) Other (community schools, religious organization, etc) ☐

2. *Please outline briefly and in point form, your organization's mandate (broad purposes, specific focus).*

3. *Please indicate your role and responsibility within the organization.*

PLEASE TURN OVER

II. NEEDS OF STREET YOUTH

Check (✓) the services that your agency provides for street youth.

1. Physical Needs

- (a) shelter ☐
- (b) food ☐
- (c) clothing ☐
- (d) health care ☐
- (e) meeting place ☐
- (f) athletics ☐
- (g) other physical activities ☐
(e.g., camping, canoeing, etc.)

2. Social and Emotional Needs

- (a) peer support ☐
- (b) opportunities to contribute to society ☐
- (c) opportunities to develop personal creativity ☐
- (d) life skills ☐
- (e) tutoring ☐
- (f) parenting classes ☐
- (g) support for addictions ☐
- Comments.*

3. Cultural/Spiritual Needs

- (a) cultural education ☐
- (b) cultural activities (e.g., sweat lodges, cultural camps, pow wows) ☐
- (c) access to elders ☐
- (d) Christian education (e.g., Bible study) ☐
- (e) retreats ☐
- (f) prayer groups ☐
- (g) access to spiritual counsellors ☐
- (h) access to religious instruction other than Christian ☐
- (i) opportunities for spiritual development with no one religious or cultural affiliation ☐

4. *Does your organization provide other services not mentioned? Please describe here.*

III. RESTRICTING FACTORS

1. Check (✓) the factors that you think hinder or block you (or your organization) from fulfilling your mandate.

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| (a) paperwork | <input type="checkbox"/> | (h) policies of provincial government agencies | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) financial restrictions | <input type="checkbox"/> | (i) policies of municipal government agencies | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) complicated approval system | <input type="checkbox"/> | (j) limited cultural awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) location of office | <input type="checkbox"/> | (k) barriers which stem from nature/needs of youth on the street (e.g., distrust of authority) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (e) insufficient personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> | (l) increasing stress of service providers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (f) inadequately trained personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| (g) policies of my organization
(Please explain.) | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

2. Are there other factors (not mentioned above) that hinder or block you or your organization from fulfilling your mandate? Please describe here.

3. List three factors that you consider most important for successful programs that focus on youth on the streets.

(a)

(b)

(c)

IV. INTEGRATION OF SERVICES

1. Check (✓) the agencies that your organization cooperates with in providing services to youth on the street.

- | Agency | Cooperation | Agency | Cooperation |
|---|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| (a) Aboriginal Affairs
Gov't of Saskatchewan | <input type="checkbox"/> | (c) Family Connections
Sask Social Services | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) Chili for children | <input type="checkbox"/> | (d) Isobel Johnson Centre | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Agency	Cooperation	Agency	Cooperation
(e) Circle of Life Lutheran Native Ministry	<input type="checkbox"/>	(p) Pathfinders Program Scott Collegiate	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) The Street Project Community Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	(q) Recovery Homes Inc. Detox Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g) Cornwall Alternative School	<input type="checkbox"/>	(r) Mobile Crisis Agency	<input type="checkbox"/>
(h) Dale's House	<input type="checkbox"/>	(s) Child and Youth Services	<input type="checkbox"/>
(i) Ehrlo Community Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	(t) Paul Dojack Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>
(j) Family Service Bureau	<input type="checkbox"/>	(u) Rainbow Youth	<input type="checkbox"/>
(k) Human Resources Dev Canada Employment Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	(v) Regina and District Food Bank	<input type="checkbox"/>
(l) Regina Catholic Family Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	(w) Literacy Service for Learners Regina Public Library	<input type="checkbox"/>
(m) Regina Friendship Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	(x) Soul's Harbour	<input type="checkbox"/>
(n) Transition House	<input type="checkbox"/>	(y) Youth Unlimited	<input type="checkbox"/>
(o) Carmichael Outreach	<input type="checkbox"/>	(z ¹) Regina Native Services, General Hospital	<input type="checkbox"/>
		(z ²) Other (<i>Please identify.</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Check (✓) the boxes (□) that indicate how you cooperate with other agencies or organizations now.

- (a) referrals ☐
- (b) sharing space ☐
- (c) share administrative services ☐
- (d) liaison with other professionals for
"hands-on" services (e.g., dental nurse comes to program) ☐
- (e) communicate, talk, plan,
share experiences & information ☐
- (f) pooled resources and resource sharing ☐
- (g) shared fund raising (e.g., United Way) ☐
- (h) Other (*Please identify.*) ☐

3. *What are the benefits of cooperating with other agencies or organizations?*
4. *Can you identify gaps that exist in services provided for youth? Please describe.*
5. *Please provide examples of other kinds of integrative or cooperative practices that could benefit youth on the street.*

V. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Space is provided for additional comments that you think would be important for us to know.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

Please return this completed survey (in the self-addressed, stamped envelope) to:

**Saskatchewan Instructional
Development & Research Unit
Faculty of Education
University of Regina
Regina, SK S4S 0A2**

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

SERVICE PROVIDERS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions are representative of semi-structured interviews held with front-line/administrative service providers in government and nongovernment positions.

- What is your role and responsibility as outlined in your job description?
- To what extent are you able to fulfill those expectations? How does your everyday job reality compare or match your job description?
- Describe what a typical day might look like?
- Could you give us an estimate as to the number of youth on the street (according to characteristics/criteria established)?
- To what extent do you cooperate and integrate your services with other government (municipal/provincial) agencies? With nongovernment agencies? With education? What is the nature of cooperation/integration? How effective do you think it is?
- Are there any factors that hinder and block you from fulfilling your mandate or job responsibilities? What is the nature of those factors? Structural? Personnel? Policies?
- What do you perceive the fundamental needs of youth you work with to be in the following areas: physical, social, educational, family?
- Are there any barriers in service provision that limit the involvement of youth?
- Do you feel that any of the services might be narrow or short-sighted in their focus?
- What service, program or infrastructure changes could be made to better meet the needs of these young people?
- What suggestions would you make regarding ways to better engage the youth in programs?
- Do you feel the cultural needs of the youth you serve are being met?
- What is the most frustrating or discouraging aspect of your job? What is the most rewarding?

STREET YOUTH/YOUTH AT RISK INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions are representative of the semi-structured interviews held with street youth/youth at risk in the Regina Hidden Youth Project.

- Could you please tell me about your background?
- Have you always lived in Regina?
- Have you ever lived on the streets or away from home? Tell me about some of your experiences on the street.
- How did you provide for yourself? Where/how did you get your money? What did you do with the money you got from stealing? How much money did you make in a day?
- Do you use drugs or alcohol? What kind of drugs? Where do you get the drugs from?
- How long have you been working the streets? How did you get started? Do you practice safe sex? Say you had someone younger than you who was considering working the streets, what would you tell them?
- Could you tell me about your school experiences? What grade level have you completed? When did you drop out of school? Why did you drop out? Do you ever intend to return to school?

- Could you tell me about your home life? When did you first run from home? What caused you to run? Where did you stay when you were on the run? Have you ever lived in foster care?
- Have you ever been in custody? Why were you sent there? How long were you there? Were you involved in any programs there? Did the program help you?
- Have you ever been involved with any kind of government people/services? Did you ever speak to them about what was going on in your home life? Are you aware of any government agencies that might be able to help you? Have you ever been to any nongovernment agencies?
- Have you ever encountered any kind of prejudice or discrimination or unfair treatment on the street? Other places?
- Is there a high number of homeless youth? What do you have in common with your street friends? What is a typical day like for you and your friends?
- What do you think is the biggest obstacle that youth are facing today?
- Do you have any role models, people you admire or look up to?
- Do you ever dream or fantasize about another way of life, or living some place else?
- What are some of the strengths you think you have? What are you good at doing?
- Are you involved in anything with your culture? What type of things? Would you like to go back to those?
- When you wake up in the morning, what's your idea of what's going to happen for the day?
- If you could help out other kids, or if you were in charge of, say, a government agency or school, what would you do? What would be different? What are some of the things you would change?

APPENDIX C

Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

OFFICE OF ASSOCIATE VICE-PRESIDENT AND DEAN
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

DATE: November 3, 1998

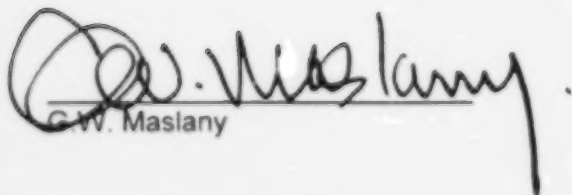
TO: C. Krentz
SIDRU

FROM: G.W. Maslany, Chair
Research Ethics Review Committee

Re: Regina's Hidden Youth Project

Please be advised that the committee has considered this proposal and has agreed that it is:

- X 1. Acceptable as submitted.
(Note: Only those applications designated in this way have ethical approval for the research on which they are based to proceed.)
2. Acceptable subject to the following changes and precautions (see attached):
Note: These changes must be resubmitted to the Committee and deemed acceptable by it prior to the initiation of the research. Once the changes are regarded as acceptable a new approval form will be sent out indicating it is acceptable as submitted.
Please address the concerns raised by the reviewer(s) by means of a supplementary memo.
3. Unacceptable to the Committee as submitted. Please contact the Chair for advise on whether or how the project proposal might be revised to become acceptable (ext. 4161/5186.)


G.W. Maslany

cc: «sup», supervisor